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UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

**Refugees and Return: A comparative
study of Kosovar Albanians in Italy and
the UK**

by

Katia Amore

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the

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ABSTRACT

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN ETHNIC RELATIONS

Doctor of Philosophy

by Katia Amore

This thesis, through a comparative study of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy, develops an understanding of refugees' attitudes towards return and identifies the factors that influence their decision-making process through the analysis of their interaction with the country of origin and the society of reception.

It formulates a theoretical approach to the study of refugee repatriation based on Archer's form of sociological realism and her morphogenetic model, while also drawing on previous studies of refugee flight, settlement and return, which argue for the advantage of studying refugee specific issues as part of the whole chain of events that characterise the experience of exile. As such, it represents a contribution towards the theoretical understanding of refugees in general and refugee repatriation in particular.

The case study is grounded on this theoretical approach and analyses refugees' perspectives on return within the proposed frame. It is based upon a qualitative study through fieldwork with refugees in both countries of exile and in this respect marks a distinctive contribution to the study of refugees in the UK and in Italy in general, and to the study of refugees' approach to return in particular.

The thesis dismisses the predominant assumption of governments that 'all refugees want to return' and concludes that refugees' attitudes towards return depend on a range of factors: their relationship with the country of origin, their interaction with the country of exile and their personal background. More significantly, it demonstrates the linkages between these factors and the time and modality of their flight, their interaction with the reception, integration and repatriation policies of the country of exile and their relationship with the conflict and society in the country of origin. In this respect, it represents a contribution to existing studies of refugee repatriation through the development of a more sophisticated account of what influences the decision-making process of refugees vis-à-vis return.

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Nomenclature

CIR	Consiglio Italiano per I Rifugiati
DPK	Democratic Progress of Kosova
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
ELR	Exceptional Leave to Remain
EU	European Union
FRY	Former Republic of Yugoslavia
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
IAC	Interim Administrative Council
ICS	Italian Consortium of Solidarity
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRO	International Refugee Organisation
JIAS	Joint Interim Administrative Structure
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KPS	Kosovo Police Service
KVARP	Kosovan Voluntary Assisted Return Programme
LDK	Democratic League of Kosovo
LGA	Local Government Association
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

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LDK	Democratic League of Kosovo
LGA	Local Government Association
NASS	National Asylum Support Service
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSCE-KVM	OSCE-Kosovo Verification Mission
PGK	Provisional Government of Kosova
PNA	Programma Nazionale Asilo
RCO	Refugee Community Organisation
RRRF	Rapid Response Returns Facility
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General
TFR	Task Force on Returns
UCK	Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosoves
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
UPS	Students Union of the Prishtina University

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“We cannot ignore the fact that the voluntary nature of repatriation is increasingly being undermined by a mounting number of forcible returns in situations which are far from safe.” (Ogata, 1997)

From the early 1980s onwards, repatriation has been increasingly promoted, by both governments and United Nations’ agencies, as the main solution to refugees’ displacement. However, such views were not merely reflected in the efforts invested in supporting return but also in the efforts directed towards limiting the possibilities for permanent settlement through the introduction of a series of restrictive changes to the asylum regime. This confluence of approaches has led to new forms of repatriation, which take place under premature and violent conditions and are characterised by large numbers of refugees returning to their country while the conflict is still unresolved. Indeed, as Stein points out, “today we talk of premature repatriation, rescue repatriation and violent repatriation as well as expulsion, deportation and *refoulement*” (Stein, 1997, p.3). In short, repatriation has come to be considered as the inevitable final phase of a refugee’s experience, rather than just one of the possible solutions.

These issues repeatedly came to the fore of the European political and public debate throughout the 1990s, which was defined as the ‘decade of repatriation’ by former United Nations High Commissioner Sadako Ogata. During this time, the crisis in the former Republic of Yugoslavia brought the horrors of war back into the heart of Europe and

caused the dramatic exodus of millions of refugees, mainly seeking asylum within the continent. This corresponded to the development of a new restrictive approach to the problem of immigration and asylum in western European countries. In fact, many governments adopted, for the first time, temporary forms of protection for refugees from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. Repatriation played a major role in the new asylum regime as it was seen as the ‘natural’ outcome of temporary protection and as the general desire of ‘all’ refugees. In particular, in the late 1990s the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees was flagged as proof of the success of refugee repatriation policies, due to the high number of returns, and still acts as an example to justify the views held by governments.

In this context, where return as a final outcome is taken for granted and asylum policies are increasingly restrictive, it is vital that we carefully re-examine the validity of such an approach. Such a need is made all the more relevant if we also consider that refugee repatriation is one of the most understudied issues within the general field of refugee studies. In this thesis I attempt to address these issues through a study of refugees’ attitudes towards return and the impact of repatriation policies on their decision-making process. This is done through the study of Kosovar Albanian refugees, which are often presented as the ‘success story’.

Next I provide a detailed outline of my research aims and how I intend to go about achieving them, before presenting an outline of the entire thesis and a brief note on the terminology used throughout.

1.1 Research aims

The thesis has four main aims, outlined below.

- Firstly, this thesis attempts to gain an understanding of the main factors that inform refugees’ position vis-à-vis return. This enables the identification of the factors that lead to the decision to return or not, and by consequence the role government policies play in this context.

- Secondly, it aims to examine the validity of the assumption that ‘all’ refugees want to go back to their country of origin. Since this is a central tenet of government rhetoric on refugee issues, it should be carefully questioned and the understanding provided by the first aim will facilitate this.
- Thirdly, in order to inform both debate and policy formation, this thesis aims to identify what are the optimal conditions under which a refugee can choose what to do with regards to return.
- Finally, in response to the lack of research in refugee repatriation, and in particular research that places a study of policies within the context of a theoretical framework, this thesis aims to develop a theoretical approach to the study of repatriation that is able to capture the complexity of the issues involved. This theoretical approach will underpin the other aims.

Now, in order to achieve these aims the thesis develops along two main lines:

1. the development of a theoretical framework that is informed by an analysis of existing theories of return migration and studies of refugees’ choice and is based on a sociological realist approach to the debate on structure and agency;
2. the qualitative empirical research of refugees’ interaction with repatriation policies, examining specifically the case of Kosovar Albanians in the UK and Italy.

These two lines of research are reflected in the broad division of the thesis. In the first part, I argue that refugees’ position vis-à-vis return is informed by the whole experience of exile and by their interaction with both the country of origin and the country of exile. Consequently, I develop a theoretical approach to the study of refugee repatriation that is based on Archer’s form of sociological realism and her morphogenetic scheme. This approach supports my aim of enabling the analysis of the interaction between refugees and the situation in the country of exile and country of origin, while acknowledging the complexity of the topic. As I mentioned, the development of a theoretical framework is necessary, since repatriation is one of the least researched areas in refugee studies.

This remains so despite an increase in effort during the 1990s by scholars attempting to remedy it. There are still very few attempts to develop theories of refugee repatriation, with the existing ones being dominated by attempts to study the issue through rational choice theory. Moreover, there is a lack of significant research into the refugees' approach with regard to return.

The second part of the thesis is an analysis of the data collected during fieldwork in the UK and Italy, aimed at studying the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees. This case is particularly interesting because of the large number of refugees who returned since the end of the war in June 1999, either independently or through repatriation programmes set up by European governments. The speed and the number of refugees which have returned to Kosovo is used to support the claim that all refugees wish to return and provides politicians with a good example in favour of their repatriation policies. However, despite the success of repatriation rates, not all Kosovar Albanians have repatriated and others are still fleeing to seek asylum, offering an interesting opportunity to question the idea that all refugees want to repatriate and investigate the factors that influence their choice vis-à-vis return.

Since my aim is to understand the impact of different asylum policies and socio-economic conditions in exile on the decision to repatriate I examined this case within a comparative study of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy. These countries represent two different European realities due to their geopolitical position, their history of migration, their political developments on the issue of asylum and their approach to the conflict in Kosovo. Moreover, in order to better contrast the impact of differing asylum policies on refugees' decision about return, I also compare differences between the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees who arrived in the UK and Italy spontaneously throughout the 1990s and those who came with the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme set up by the UNHCR during the 1999 refugee crisis. The flight of these two groups of refugees was clearly different as were the reception conditions they experienced in both countries. Therefore, analysing them separately and comparing the findings provides a further example of how the context in exile affects refugees' decision-making process and their attitudes vis-à-vis return.

1.2 Thesis Outline

In order to place the topic of the thesis within the current debate on repatriation as the best solution to refugee displacement, the thesis presents in Chapter 2 a brief overview of the changing role of repatriation over the last fifty years of the twentieth century. I distinguish three different historical phases and I analyse the main historical, economic, political and social developments that have contributed to the increasing interest in repatriation as the most favourable answer to the refugee problem and to the current controversies about its role. Having set the background, I delve into the core of the research on refugees' position vis-à-vis return.

In Chapter 3 I review the general literature on return migration and refugee repatriation and highlight the need for further research on the issue. Through the review I argue that refugee repatriations are a special case of return migrations which must be analysed while taking into account their particular nature. I also identify the elements that existing studies have to offer and pitfalls that I should avoid. I conclude that previous studies indicate the gains of researching the topic as part of refugees' whole experience of exile and stress the importance of considering the influence of time and space when analysing refugees' position vis-à-vis return. On the other hand, the review also highlights the limitations of using models based on rational choice theory when researching refugees' decision-making processes on return and of using generic definitions such as 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' repatriation. The chapter concludes with the explanation of the advantages of researching refugees' choice on return within Archer's understanding of the problem of structure and agency. Her methodology, based on analytical dualism, enables researchers to explore the way in which refugees interact with the developing situation in the country of origin and the asylum context in the country of exile and examine how these interactions affect their decision-making process. In Chapter 4 I provide a more detailed explanation of her methodology focusing on the concept of analytical dualism, the idea of morphogenetic/static cycles, the conceptualisation of freedom and constraint, and the stratified view of agency. These ideas form the basis of my methodology and shape the selection of research methods as explained in the second part of Chapter 4.

The two main assumptions emerging from the analysis in Chapter 3 and 4 are that in order to study refugees' position vis-à-vis return and the factors that influence the decision-making process we need to examine their interaction with both the country of origin and the country of exile and consider their attitudes on return in relation to the whole chain of events that characterised the exile experience. As such, it is necessary to examine two parallel cycles of interaction: the one with the conflict in the country of origin and the one with the country of exile.

The succession of the following chapters reflects these assumptions.

In Chapter 5 I set the background in order to understand the refugees' relationship with the country of origin. In the first part, I provide an overview of the historical development of the conflict and an analysis of refugees' interaction with it. In the second part, I explore the moment and the reasons for their flight and distinguish between refugee movements, based on the time and the mode of the flight.

In Chapter 6, 7 and 8 I examine the refugees' experience in the country of exile and compare the case of Kosovar Albanians in the UK and Italy. In Chapter 6 and 7, I study the mode of settlement of those who arrived independently and analyse the way in which various waves of refugees interacted with the different asylum systems they found in place. I also analyse the way in which their personal background, the particular relationship they had with the conflict in Kosovo and the time of their arrival influenced their interaction with both countries of exile.

In Chapter 8 I focus specifically on the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees who were evacuated during NATO's bombing campaign in 1999 to the UK or Italy through the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme set up by the UNHCR. These refugees are a particular case given that they were admitted on the explicit assumption that they would return as soon as possible. They received temporary forms of protection and special reception conditions, and were the main recipients of repatriation programmes supported by the respective governments after the end of the war.

The analysis of these two different reception contexts is particularly useful in the following chapter on return since it enables me to understand the impact of differing reception

conditions and repatriation policies on the refugees' choice on return.

This is in fact the main subject of investigation of Chapter 9 where I attempt to achieve three of the initial aims of this thesis: understand which factors influence refugees' position vis-à-vis return; examine the validity of the claim that every refugee wants to return and identify the optimal conditions for refugees' choice about return. Given my theoretical framework and initial assumptions I examine refugees' attitudes towards return by analysing three different elements: the post-war conditions in the country of origin, the repatriation policies of the countries of exile and the refugees' opinions on return. In the chapter I conclude that three main factors affect refugees' decision-making process vis-à-vis return: country of origin factors (their relationship with the country of origin in general, and the conflict in particular, and its conditions after the war), country of exile factors (their interaction with conditions in the country of exile, their degree of integration, the specific repatriation policies in place) and personal factors (the personal socio-economic background, their whole experience of exile, their plans and aspirations for the future). In the chapter, I also discuss the advantages and difficulties related to the use of the theoretical and methodological framework that I developed in the first part of the thesis.

1.3 Terminology

In the thesis I use the term 'refugee' or 'de facto refugee' in a broad sociological sense and I refer distinctly to repatriation and return as the process of going back to the land of origin. Any other specific definition of refugee or repatriation is explained in the context of the text.

The name 'Kosovo' is considered by Kosovar Albanians to be the Serb version of the Albanian 'Kosova'. However, this spelling is also the official international version and, therefore, I decided to use Kosovo throughout the thesis. I use the Albanian spelling 'Kosova' only when quoting from other authors who use it or directly from the interviews with Kosovar Albanian respondents.

With the term 'Kosovars' I refer to the whole population of Kosovo independently of the

specific ethnic groups while some direct quotations from other authors use ‘Kosovans’. I use ‘Kosovar Albanians’ to refer to the ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo.

Chapter 2

Setting the background: the changing role of repatriation

2.1 Introduction

The role of repatriation as a solution to refugee displacement has passed through different representative phases during the last fifty years of the twentieth century. It is possible to distinguish three main historical ones: the first decades of the Cold War until the 1980s, when repatriation did not represent a possible solution for refugee displacement; the 1980s, a time of transition when it began to be increasingly promoted as the best solution; the post-Cold War era, when it gained a new political meaning.

In this chapter, I examine the features of these three different phases and investigate the reasons behind the progressive shift in the political role and meaning of repatriation. This provides the necessary background to place the topic of the thesis within the current debate on whether repatriation is the best solution to refugee displacement.

2.2 The shifting significance of repatriation in the international political scene

During the first half of the twentieth century the possibility that refugees might repatriate was not considered as a feasible solution, since their displacement was generally considered permanent (Rogge, 1994). However, immediately after the end of the Second World War, millions of refugees returned to their homes and their return opened up an important political debate which led to the definition of voluntary repatriation as the most desirable solution to refugee displacement (Stein, 1990; Zieck, 1997). Nevertheless, this definition turned, almost immediately, into an unfeasible and impracticable principle due to the environment created by the Cold War. During that time, resettlement and local integration were broadly promoted and considered as more appropriate responses (Chimni, 1999). Even though the Geneva Convention of 1951 [article 1(c)(5)] considered the possibility of revoking refugee status if the circumstances in the country of origin changed, European governments' policies were oriented towards granting permanent resident status to refugees. The right to revoke the status due to the change of circumstance cessation rule, eventually, fell into disuse (Hathaway, 1997). These developments led some early refugee theorists to suggest that repatriation was unlikely to have an important role in the solution of refugee migrations, particularly those in Europe (Holborn, 1975). However, in the post-colonial era, the frequency and magnitude of repatriations, especially in Africa, has defied the postulations of these early researchers. In fact, since the early 1970s, repatriation, once again, represented 'the solution' for many refugees after the end of struggles for independence and liberation from colonial rule (Cuny and Stein, 1991). On the international scene, it is only during the 1980s that repatriation became the favoured solution of choice for governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies (Allen and Morsink, 1994). The debate within the UNHCR, between the early 1980s and early 1990s, offers a good example for explaining the development of the meaning and role of repatriation in the political arena in those years.

In 1980, a UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion on Voluntary Repatriation recognised that voluntary repatriation constitutes, generally, the most appropriate solution

for the problems of refugees (UNHCR, 1980). Nevertheless, in the conclusion it is stated that:

“(d) Considered that *when refugees express the wish to repatriate* [emphasis added], both the government of their country of origin and the government of their country of asylum should, within the framework of their national legislation and, whenever necessary, in co-operation with UNHCR take all requisite steps to assist them to do so.” (UNHCR, 1980)

The *protasis* that I emphasized above and its ensuing considerations clarify how, in this phase, the return to the homeland was strictly concerned with the refugees’ own decision to return; the switch from spontaneous repatriation to the programmed and assisted repatriation wished by the committee had the character of a simple recommendation claiming the desirability of appropriate arrangements.

Five years later, in 1985, UNHCR, in co-operation with the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, organised a round table on Voluntary Repatriation in San Remo (Italy). The aim of the meeting was to consider a study on the subject prepared by an expert for the UNHCR and provide the Executive Committee with observations and considerations for possible follow-up action. The final report of the round table shows clear signs that further steps had been taken in approaching the subject of repatriation: facilitating voluntary repatriation was not considered as a sufficient engagement for the UNHCR anymore, a stronger involvement in encouraging repatriation was thought to be ‘desirable and opportune’. In the report it is stated that:

“The Round Table reaffirmed that voluntary repatriation was, in principle, the best solution to a refugee problem, and that it was desirable and opportune to emphasise the importance of this solution and to develop international co-operation in effecting it.” (UNHCR, 1985a, p.2)

Moreover, the report and the conclusion clearly introduced a new concept: “promotion of voluntary repatriation” (UNHCR, 1985a, p.7-9). According to the outcome of the

round table the importance of UNHCR's role in facilitating the movements had to be coupled with an active promotion and encouragement of voluntary repatriation through the creation of a multilateral framework involving the international community as a whole (UNHCR, 1985a).

The Executive Committee Conclusions on Voluntary Repatriation of 1985 reflected the idea elaborated in San Remo and introduced the ideas of promoting repatriation in several points of its final text (UNHCR, 1985b). In an inter-office memorandum of 1987 on the principles and guidelines for action in voluntary repatriation, the principle of promoting the movement had already been discussed in its practical aspects:

“It is now recognised that UNHCR, in addition to facilitating voluntary repatriation, also has a legitimate role and in fact a responsibility to promote voluntary repatriation.” (UNHCR, 1987, p.3)

The increasing importance of repatriation in the UNHCR's agenda culminated in the 1991 official declaration of former United Nations High Commissioner Sadako Ogata who stated that 1992 should be seen as the first year of a decade of voluntary repatriation (Allen and Morsink, 1994; Gallagher, 1994; Takahashi, 1997; Zeager and Bascom, 1996). In fact during the 1990s, the modality and role of repatriation underwent some fundamental changes. Firstly, the 1990s witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of refugee movements. Of course, statistics concerned with repatriation movements only provide us with approximate figures since there are great difficulties in keeping comprehensive records including those on self-repatriation movements that take place out of organised monitored programmes (Stein, 1992). Nevertheless, it is possible to refer to an estimation that can provide a rough idea of the changing magnitude of the phenomenon. From 1975 through 1989 less than 4 million refugees returned to their country of origin, while between 1990 and 1996 the number reached 14 million (Stein, 1997; UNHCR, 1993). Secondly, the nature of repatriation has taken a more sinister dimension. In fact, contemporary repatriation movements take place, mostly, under premature and violent conditions and are characterised by a large number of refugees returning while the conflict in the country of origin is still ongoing (Stein, 1997). Finally, the new political

approach to the refugee problem has influenced the phenomenon of repatriation in its essential paradigm, that of voluntary movements of people. This point is clarified again by a declaration of former High Commissioner Ogata saying that:

“We cannot ignore the fact that the voluntary nature of repatriation is increasingly being undermined by a mounting number of forcible returns in situations which are far from safe.” (Ogata, 1997).

Therefore, the last decade has been characterised by a growing interest, from academics and practitioners alike, in cases of repatriation under conflict and, especially, on the pivotal issue of involuntary/forced repatriation.

In conclusion, from self-repatriation to assisted repatriation and forcible repatriation, three phases can be roughly distinguished according to the meaning, nature and role of repatriation movements: the Cold War time until 1980s, when repatriation was not considered as a possible solution for refugees’ displacement; the 1980s, when the role of repatriation began to change and acquire a renewed importance; the 1990s, the decade of repatriation. In the following sections I examine the causes that brought about these changes by referring to some of the existing academic studies that investigated the political dynamics at their roots.

2.3 The Cold War: time for settlement

Despite the fact that during the years immediately following the end of the Second World War mass returns had occurred in Europe and that even the initial UN resolutions on refugees had explicitly mentioned voluntary repatriation as the first solution, through most of the Cold War period, roughly from 1947 till the 1970s, repatriation was effectively excluded as a solution to refugees’ displacement from the public agenda. The reason for this is explained by Chimni’s words: “within a year of the end of the Second World War the question of a solution to the refugee problem had become an integral part of the Cold War” (Chimni, 1999, p.2).

Of course, the new political situation altered the frame within which the whole refugee question was discussed and the way in which the problem was dealt with (Joly, 1996). Consequently, the approach to repatriation changed in nature due to the tension between the Eastern and Western blocs. In fact, during the Cold War, refugees' flights associated with the escape from communism were automatically accepted by Western European governments or by the United States, Canada or Australia (Black and Koser, 1999). This was the case with thousands of refugees who had been given permission to leave Czechoslovakia in 1948, with some Hungarians who had, suddenly, flown into Austria in 1956 or thousands of Cubans who had escaped from Castro's regime and were unreservedly accepted by the United States during the 1950s and the 1960s (Gallagher, 1994; Joly, 1996). Conversely, refugees fleeing from countries that entertained good relations with the host countries' governments encountered many obstacles and difficulties in their search for asylum. For example, this was the case of refugees coming from non-communist states such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti (Gallagher, 1994; Joly, 1996).

The age of the Cold War witnessed mass refugee movements from one very poor country to another. The international community approached these movements using the same meter that had been calibrated on the political alignment of the government in the country of origin. The main attention and concern was focused on those cases of displacement caused by conflicts conducted by proxy by the two Superpowers (Black and Koser, 1999). In fact, between the 1960s and the 1970s, in many third world countries the mass movements of refugees who had fled from independence struggles not directly linked to the two blocs' tensions, were offered two solutions for their displacement once the conflict was over: integration in the areas they had moved to or repatriation (Gallagher, 1994). Nevertheless, when the conflicts were entwined with Cold War politics, as in the case of Afghanistan, Somalia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, etc., solutions to the struggle were harder to find and, consequently, repatriation was not considered as a feasible near-term solution (Gallagher, 1994).

In the specific case of Western powers, repatriation had lost its role as a feasible durable solution for the refugee problem for different reasons mainly linked to the Cold War

political tensions. Gallagher (1994) indicates three main factors:

1. Western powers were not worried about the possible mass influx of people from Eastern Europe, since they knew Eastern European governments forbade and hindered people's exit and put pressure to encourage the return of those who had already claimed asylum in Western European countries.
2. In this political frame, the idea that the causes of the flight, in a word 'communism', could have an end was not considered as a possible option in the foreseeable future.
3. In the bipolar dimension of the Cold War, refugees fleeing from communist regimes acquired a particular political value for the host countries national and international policy.

Moreover, Chimni (1999) explores the economic reasons that lie behind the eclipse of repatriation from the triad of proposed solutions to refugees' displacement. After the Second World War, Western European states recovered rapidly from the economic disasters caused by the war. In this process of reconstruction refugees acquired a very important role, since they compensated for the labour force lost in the war. He explains that this reality had an important impact on the European states' preference for resettlement as a solution to the problem of the 1,000,000 refugees remaining in Europe.

Allen and Morsink (1994) highlight another factor in this picture: the creation of the state of Israel. The mass flight of Palestinians leaving their homes after the Israeli victories in the 1948 and 1967 wars, presented peculiar features that influenced the general political discourses on repatriation. In fact, on the one hand, Israel consistently refused to allow Palestinians to repatriate while encouraging other Jews, from anywhere else in the world, to 'return' to the 'Promised Land'. On the other hand, Palestinian refugees did not abandon their desire to return to their homes, rejecting any suggestions of resettlement (Barakat, 1973). Obviously, considering the importance of the issue for regional and international politics and its possible repercussions on international diplomacy, "Zionist demands for the right of repatriation to a Biblical homeland, and competing Palestinian demands to repatriate from their refugee camps, made debate

about the general issue of returning refugees very sensitive” (Allen and Morsink, 1994, p.2-3).

Therefore, repatriation was not used or promoted as a response to the refugee problem throughout the Cold War period and remained only formally regarded as one of the best solutions to the problem, because of the Soviet Union and other communist countries’ pressure to encourage refugees to return. This is reflected in the fact that, in practice, between 1947 and 1950, the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) repatriated 72,834 refugees, only 5% of the number of displaced people registered with the organisation and the majority of repatriation movements took place in Third World countries following the end of struggles for decolonization (Chimni, 1999).

In the following section I analyse the general reasons for the progressive switch towards a higher political consideration of repatriation on the international scene that took place during the 1980s.

2.4 1980s: a decade of transition

During the 1980s some fundamental changes on the international scene reshaped the whole problem of displacement and its legal, economic, political and social aspects and, of course, this process also involved the political value of repatriation.

With the colonial wars having largely come to an end by 1980, most of the refugee-producing conflicts involved independent states and arose, mainly, because of internal nation-building problems, revolutionary changes, conflict with neighbours, ideological and ethnic conflicts, secessionism and ecological disasters (Zeager and Bascom, 1996). During this decade, the number of people seeking asylum began to increase: in the early 1980s the global refugee total exceeded 10 million people, slightly diminishing in 1983 and growing again to reach 17 million by the end of the decade (Zeager and Bascom, 1996). Generally, people fled from poor countries to other low-income states although some of them directed their flight towards industrialised countries. This was the time when the latter began to orientate their asylum policies towards a more restrictive approach. Gallagher describes ‘richer states’ “fear of being overwhelmed with people trying to

gain entry by using lengthy and costly procedures for making determinations as to who will receive political asylum" (Gallagher, 1994, p.11). The rhetoric of this new political approach took into consideration the fact that refugees from the South were now making their way to the North in a time when there was no shortage of labour, thus impelling governments to reconsider the issue in other than the Cold War context (Chimni, 1999).

In this changing political atmosphere, repatriation began to take on a new practical value for both countries of exile and countries of origin. No more relegated to the level of a theoretical paradigm of durable solutions to refugee displacement, it became the most convenient solution for those countries that were restricting their asylum policies. Thus, Chimni explains that: "the advocates of voluntary repatriation simply assumed that all refugees desired to go home. It was not seen as a 'hypothesis to be tested', but as a statement of fact which presumed knowledge of refugees" (Chimni, 1999, p.4).

However, while countries of exile were beginning to turn repatriation from a possible solution in principle into a feasible one in practice, on the other side, many governments in the home countries had no interest in facilitating the process of repatriation for several reasons: attempting to keep certain groups of refugees out of the country; preventing all those political and economic problems linked to forms of mass repatriation inflows or using repatriation as a bargaining tool to obtain a more substantial financial support from the international community (Zeager and Bascom, 1996).

Obviously, the UNHCR was involved in these changes and, had to both respond to new political pressures and to the new exigencies of the refugees. Therefore, the lively debate on refugee repatriation that began to take place within the organisation at the beginning of the 1980s, which I described earlier, represented the first important attempt to establish guidelines to be followed on matters of assisted refugee repatriation movements. The difficult task was that of establishing basic principles that while not operating against the refugees' basic rights and interests, would not 'discourage' UNHCR's donors and succumb to the countries of origins' requests.

Therefore, the 1980s can be seen as an important period of transition in the international political approach to repatriation leading to the 1990s being defined as the 'decade of voluntary repatriation'. Of course, there is still a pivotal historical moment to be taken

into consideration in refugee studies, which is the end of the Cold War. This was an event that opened a new chapter for the world refugee problem in general and a new page for the specific chapter of repatriation in particular.

2.5 1990s: the decade of repatriation

Joly affirms that “the end of the Cold War has freed asylum policies from the straight-jacket of the two blocs” (Joly, 1996, p.41). She explains how the new political scenario, though disentangled from the disparities of treatment reserved for refugees according to their provenance from communist or non-communist countries, did not lead to a more balanced asylum policy, as could be expected. On the contrary, the process leading to a more restrictive tendency in asylum policies, which had already taken its first steps during the 1980s, came to be exacerbated by the end of the Cold War, having a serious impact on refugee repatriation.

Briefly, it is the interplay of three new elements that changed the face of ‘repatriation’ in the 1990s: the new restrictive asylum policies of the receiving countries, the introduction of new forms of temporary permission to stay for the refugees and the entry of the concepts of ‘prevention’ and ‘intervention’ into the paradigm for durable solutions in the name of a new ‘militarised humanitarianism’ (Allen and Turton, 1996).

Firstly, we have to consider that in the light of the new political situation it could no longer be assumed that the restriction by the communist governments of people’s exit from their countries would prevent mass movements into Western Europe. In fact, the first large influx of migrants between 1989 and 1991 confirmed the new reality (Gallagher, 1994). Moreover, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, borders that had been stable throughout the Cold War period began to crumble and with it came the end of a strong ideological contrast, giving way to the rise of refugee-generating conflicts linked to ethnic, religious and national rivalries that had been suffocated at the time of the iron-curtain. In this important historical period the questions of borders, citizenship, sovereignty, security and movements across frontiers gathered momentum and ‘migration’ became an issue of great importance at both international and national level. Especially in Western

Europe, migration acquired an increasing role in the political debate and its political and economic utility began to be questioned. As a consequence of this, politicians began to foster restrictive, rigorous norms as a solution to the problem (Joly, 1992). Of course, the new era of 'restrictionism' included asylum policies too. In a post bipolar system refugees lost their political and economic value and began to represent a drain for the local economy and a social threat to national societies. Abramowitz (1994) remarks that while it became clear that the end of the Cold War would have not put an end to the rapid rise in refugee numbers at the same time the world's interest in refugees had declined.

As Hathaway remarks:

"The demise of the post-War interest-convergence between many States and refugees has generated a combination of 'non-entre' tactics and confinement of refugees in their own countries. Even when the arrival of refugees is logistically or politically impossible to avoid, most developed States today see little reason to grant refugees more than the bare minimum entitlements required by law" (Hathaway, 1997, p.553).

In fact, in the 1990s, the political tension between an international humanitarian duty of giving shelter to asylum seekers and national pressures to restrict their access to the status of 'convention refugees', led many industrialised countries to introduce new designations short of full refugee status such as 'temporary protection' or 'exceptional leave to remain'. This has enormously influenced the whole refugee experience and has given a new meaning to refugee repatriation.

The political debate on 'temporary protection' represents an emblematic example of the new political approach to repatriation. In fact, the expression 'temporary protection' obviously indicates a determined period of time and represents a moment of transition to 'something else'. As Black et al. (1998) suggest, the 'temporariness' implies the condition of being either *en route* to a more permanent status or *en route* to return. Nevertheless, in the 1990s politicians favoured the interpretation of the meaning of temporary protection as *en route* to repatriation. For example, in the debate around temporary

protection in the Bosnian refugee case in Europe, political discourses about policies of settlement either in favour of refugees' 'integration/inclusion' or 'isolation/exclusion' turned around repatriation. The authors distinguish two general opposing arguments sharing the same aim of 'sending people back': "the integration of persons given temporary refuge will forestall or complicate return" or "integration is best preparation for repatriation" (Black et al., 1998, p.458).

Despite the fact that in practice, most EU member states did not force Bosnian refugees to repatriate¹ (with the exception of Germany), it is relevant to notice that opposite political discourses focused on the best form of reception that might ensure the final repatriation of temporarily protected refugees. This point is particularly relevant for the understanding of the response of Western European governments to the following Balkan refugee crisis in Kosovo which is the main focus of this thesis.

Joly (1996) indicates another important post Cold War element of change, which is the awareness of the international community that there is now a wider space for action and intervention in the countries of origin that could legitimize less open asylum policies. Under the new frame of 'humanitarianism' it became possible to intervene directly "against violations of human rights, generalised violence and severe deprivations, as international co-operation is not as in the past hampered by the two blocs jealously guarding their sphere of influence" (Joly, 1996, p.41). This has influenced enormously the whole debate on refugee repatriations and, generally, has led politicians to consider it as part of the protection paradigm with serious consequences for the refugees' freedom of choice whether or not to repatriate. The new pro-intervention rhetoric together with the resurgence of interest in forms of temporary protection has led to Hathaway's consideration that:

"[...]if refugees are to be guaranteed access to meaningful protection until and unless it is safe to go home, it cannot be asserted that they should routinely be entitled to stay in the host State once the harm in their own country has been brought to an end." (Hathaway, 1997, p.554)

¹Some countries transferred the majority of Bosnians with temporary protection en group to a more permanent status (Austria, Finland, Luxemburg) while others assessed individual people asylum application under the national asylum policy (Denmark, Netherland).

Therefore, his argument follows:

“[...] governments will have to follow through on their rhetorical commitment to ‘root causes’ intervention by acting to eradicate the harms that force refugees to escape.” (Hathaway, 1997, p.557)

Therefore, according to this logic, by eliminating or suffocating the causes of the conflicts that generate refugees, states acquire the ‘right’ to repatriate people on the basis of humanitarian discourses and on the assumption that all refugees want to go back to their country of origin. Moreover, in the absence of clear internationally recognized parameters for defining a country as safe, states have also gained the ‘right’ to arbitrarily declare when it is ‘safe’ for refugees to return even when the original problems that were the ‘root causes’ of exile have not been fully resolved yet. As a result, nowadays, repatriation has often been connected with international peace-keeping efforts. Many repatriation programmes are intertwined with peace accords and multi-dimensional peace-building efforts and often take place under premature conditions leading to forms of ‘militarised repatriation’. Later in the thesis, I discuss the consequences of this kind of a scenario in the specific case of Kosovar Albanian refugees.

Overall, these new political practices have called into question how ‘voluntary’ some repatriation programs really are and raised doubts about repatriation as a durable solution to refugee displacement. Sadako Ogata, warned that compelling refugees to ‘repatriate too early’ may give relief to the asylum countries through “a dangerous shifting of the burden back to the country of origin. Premature repatriation puts refugees at risk and may jeopardise a successful transition from war to peace” (Ogata, 1997). Nevertheless, politicians still promote the idea of repatriation as the first solution for refugees. They support this position by stressing the importance of the country of origin in refugees’ lives and promoting an idealised image of return able to legitimatise measures taken to compell refugees to go back to their country of origin. The political emphasis on repatriation influences the asylum debate and justifies the elaboration of new restrictive asylum policies. This shapes, unavoidably, the current situation many refugees are facing in Western countries.

2.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I argued that the emergence of repatriation on the political agenda and the different phases the modalities of repatriation have been through are directly connected and depend on the progressive changes in the host countries' policies of asylum. During the Cold War repatriation fell into disuse because the general political context rendered it an unfeasible solution. Moreover, in Western Europe, settlement was encouraged as refugees paid a valuable contribution to the post-Second World War reconstruction and the international Palestinian question made return a diplomatic taboo.

However, during the 1980s, governments began to introduce restrictive immigration and asylum measures which contributed to a progressive switch towards a higher political consideration of repatriation on the international agenda. This situation was exacerbated by the end of the Cold War which led many Western countries to adopt measures that could restrict access to asylum procedures, reduce support for asylum seekers and introduce temporary forms of protections with the aim of discouraging the refugees' long term integration. Moreover, by promoting a new pro-intervention rhetoric of eliminating root causes, governments acted as also having the 'right' to establish when the country of origin is 'safe' for refugees to return to. This is the context within which Kosovar Albanian refugees experienced exile throughout the 1990s, and in particular during the 1999 refugee crisis that developed alongside NATO's intervention in Kosovo. In this thesis I examine this specific case in the attempt to understand the impact of the new face of repatriation on their attitudes toward return and their decision-making process. Before focusing on the case study, though, in the next two chapters I develop a theoretical and methodological approach that can enable me to examine the complexity of the issue.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Background

3.1 Introduction

Return migration is one of the least researched areas in the study of human migration, despite the fact that several scholars have underlined the importance of this aspect of migration and advocated for further studies in this area. This dearth in research has been attributed to the difficulties in obtaining satisfactory data due to the individual or family nature that characterised the majority of return movements in the past (Arowolo, 2000; King, 1986). King affirms that “the nets cast out in migration surveys and national census usually allow return migration to slip through” and he states that, therefore, “it is not surprising, though not entirely excusable, that so many studies of migration proceeded as if no returns ever took place” (King 1986, p.1). Before the 1960s, he explains, the literature on migration had dismissed the phenomenon of return migration. In the few cases where the issue was mentioned it was often to lament that so little material existed (King, 1986). Even though during the 1970s the research on return migration was somewhat intensified (Cerase and Rosoli, 1983), almost twenty years later many authors are still pointing at the same dearth in research (King, 2000). Ghosh (2000) affirms that the “return movement [...] has so far remained inadequately unravelled in the migration debate” and King (2000) reaffirms that “return migration is the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration”. He explains that the great majority of studies on return migration have an empirical or descriptive nature and locates the main pitfalls of the

existing literature in the tendency to examine each group of return migrants as a distinct entity. Moreover, he points out the lack of cross-national comparisons and theoretical synthesis. Similarly, another area of migration research which has been neglected is that of refugee migration (Joly, 2000). This is due to the fact that for several years, after the Second World War, the issue was studied mainly from a legal perspective in relation to the right of asylum, while the study of the subject from the perspective of other disciplines is relatively recent. Overall, although the field has grown considerably over the end of the twentieth century, in parallel with the significance of the phenomenon of forced migration itself (Black, 2001), we still find a wide gulf between the literature on refugee studies and that on migration studies (Bakewell, 2000).

The general remarks about the paucity of research at the level of both return migration and refugee studies are even more markedly accentuated when one begins to deal with the issue of return in relation to refugees. During the second half of the twentieth century refugee repatriation movements have increasingly gained a more important role in the political and academic debate about refugee displacement. This culminated in the ideas that were developed during the eighties by academics and practitioners who identified repatriation as one of the three durable solutions to refugee situations together with resettlement to a third country and local integration (Adelman, 1988; Chimni, 1991; Gallagher, 1994; Goodwin-Gill, 1990; Rogge, 1994; Takahashi, 1997).

In the main, the academic interest on refugee repatriation has grown in parallel to the growing political interest on the topic during the 1980s and the 1990s. However, in the 1980s scholars were still warning the international community of the serious lack of studies on the subject. For example, in 1989, Harrell-Bond (1989) writes about the lack of published research data and emphasises how necessary this was for enabling researchers to test the assumptions about return that govern policies and practices of governments and international agencies.

Coles highlights the same dearth in research in a report prepared for the UNHCR's Round Table on voluntary repatriation held in San Remo in 1985, where he writes that:

“Although voluntary repatriation has been proclaimed as, in principle, the

most desirable solution to a refugee situation, it has so far not been examined in any depth by experts or scholars.” (Coles, 1985)

Allen and Morsink (1994), referring to a survey of the literature between developing countries conducted by Crisp in 1987 for UNRISD, highlight that the survey revealed the existence of a slightly wider body of literature, compared to what Coles had presented in his report, and indicated that the majority of the studies on repatriation had mainly focused on three aspects of the phenomenon: international law, political motivations and logistics. With regard to international law the issues emphasised by research were the international approach to legal matters, the basic rights for refugees to return to their country of origin and UNHCR’s position in the repatriation process. The studies on political motivations focused on specific population movements. Finally, studies on logistics described the organisation of specific operations (Allen and Morsink, 1994). Allen and Morsink conclude by stating that:

“A few of these publications and reports were of high quality, but many large-scale repatriations had hardly been examined at all, and few authors had made any serious attempt to investigate the experiences of the returnees themselves.” (Allen and Morsink, 1994, p.2).

A more recent overview of the academic studies on repatriation is provided by Preston (1999). Referring to a broad range of literature she explains that the studies conducted before 1999 revolved around three main stages of the repatriation process: the decision and preparation phase, the actual back-home movement and the post arrival integration and reconstruction stage. In the analysis of each of these phases, scholars have looked at a range of micro, meso, macro and meta-level factors. For example: “the characteristics of the groups involved; their community, organisational, national and international policy environments; global, legal, social and economic trends; and language, ideology and theory” (Preston, 1999, p.21). She states that the bulk of academic research consists of case studies of particular groups, field-based studies, geographical and legal approaches to the movements and economic, anthropological and psychological research on reintegration and reconstruction in the country of origin and there is still a dearth

of theoretical developments on the subject.

This chapter deals with the major theoretical issues related to the study of refugee repatriation. I investigate the arguments for and against studying refugee repatriation as a separate case within the general context of return migration. Having established the need for specific research, I then examine existing theoretical frameworks that deal with the issue, identifying their limitations as well as their positive contributions. Finally, I argue for the consideration of refugees' choice vis-à-vis return within Archer's approach to the classic theoretical debate on structure and agency.

3.2 The uniqueness of refugee repatriation

Given that the majority of theories on return are mostly concerned with labour migration I examine here more closely the question of whether such theories are sufficient to explain refugee repatriation as well or whether there is a real need for a specific approach to refugee repatriation.

Koser (1993) states that when studying repatriation we can view refugees as special migrants and explains that, like return migrants, they go back to the country of origin as a result of a balanced decision depending on their personal aspirations and information available on wider structural conditions. His ideas suggest that repatriation can be better understood if return refugees are considered as any other return migrants. This assertion places the issue firmly within the theoretical debate inside migration studies questioning whether it is possible to differentiate refugees from labour migrants. Therefore, the answer to our initial question is directly related to whether we can distinguish refugees from economic migrants or not and, if we can, to which extent do the two groups differ from each other with respect to return.

3.2.1 The distinction between refugees and labour migrants

The academic debate on this issue has developed in relation to the causes of departure and revolves around two main points: the 'political' versus 'economic' nature of the

factors causing the flight and the 'voluntary' versus 'involuntary' character of it (Joly, 2002). Some scholars claim that refugee migrations can be distinguished from labour migrations because the first are primarily involuntary movements caused by political factors while the second are generally voluntary movements driven by economic factors. These considerations are the basis of the standard dichotomy of the 'involuntary-political-refugee' versus the 'voluntary-economic-migrant' (Schuster, 1998). Other scholars reject this sharp distinction between economic and political factors since they consider that "...state policy in relation to migration generally, and refugees and asylum seekers in particular, is constructed in response to political as well as economic factors, and the two are most frequently intimately interwoven" (Schuster, 1998, p.31). Of course, the two categories should not be perceived under a static and rigid division since a refugee could also find better economic opportunities while in exile or an economic migrant could suddenly become a refugee in relation to the political events occurring in his country of origin. Castles states that:

"the distinctions between the various types of migrations [...] are only relative [...] fundamental societal changes lead both to economically motivated migration and to politically motivated flight and that at times it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two" (Castles and Miller, 1993, p.25-26).

The Kinetic Model of Kunz (1973) about flight and settlement patterns of refugee settlers divides refugees into two categories which can explain the reason why in certain cases some refugees can be considered as labour migrants. He distinguishes two kinetic types of refugee movements: 'anticipatory refugee movement' and 'acute refugee movements'.

In the first case, the anticipatory refugee leaves the home country before the deterioration of the military or political situation. Depending on the perceived approaching danger the person will have more or less time to decide and plan their flight. The refugee may have preferences on where to go, but other factors, outside personal wishes, will eventually determine the destination. In the second case, acute refugee movements are a consequence of great political changes or movements of armies. In this case people flee in mass or in groups, in order to escape the immediate danger and run to safety in a

neighbouring country or nearby country willing to grant them asylum. If the situation deteriorates, further migration to a different country might follow. According to Kunz (1973), in the case of anticipatory refugee movements, it is not unusual that the loss of freedom in the country of origin or the danger to life is preceded by gradual economic restrictions thus leading to an anticipatory refugee being mistaken for a voluntary migrant seeking better economic opportunities. In this case he suggests that:

“...the fact that some anticipatory refugee moves superficially resemble voluntary migrations should not deter us from classifying these as refugee movements. To correctly identify these movements, knowledge of the historical background becomes indispensable.” (Kunz, 1973, p.132)

Joly (2002), also, explains that when distinguishing between the two groups, we are not dealing with watertight categories since many migration flows include both economic migrants and refugees coming from the same place of origin and arriving in the same country of migration or exile.

Overall, it is evident that basic differences characterise and distinguish the refugees' experience from that of labour migrants that cannot either be dismissed, or reduced to the pre-migration phase and to the causes of the flight. The acceptance of a fundamental distinction between refugees and economic migrants cannot be confined to their reasons for the flight, as suggested by Koser (1993), since it is most likely that those initial differences also affect the following phases of a refugee's life. The psychological, legal, social conditions continue to have a different impact on the way people cope with their life in the country of migration or exile, and affect the way in which they face the possibility of repatriating.

3.2.2 Refugees and general typologies of return migration

It is possible to highlight some of the specificities that distinguish the case of refugee repatriation from that of other types of migrants by looking at some typologies of return migration as presented in the overview of return migration theories by King (2000) and relating them to the case of refugees.

The first typology is based on the levels of development of both the receiving and sending countries and relies on neoclassical economic theories of migration (King, 2000), which, in essence, argue that the difference in wages causes workers from a low-wage country to move to a high-wage country (Massey et al., 1993). In the case of refugees it would be necessary to take into account the peculiarity of a post-conflict situation where personal economic interests come after the need for safety and where the relationship between country of origin and country of migration is determined by the aftermath of a conflict.

The second typology takes into account the time spent back in the country of origin distinguishing between ‘occasional returns’ during holidays or for family events, ‘seasonal returns’ dictated by the periodical temporary nature of the work activities abroad, ‘temporary returns’ when the migrant stays in the country of origin for a significant period of time retaining the intention to migrate abroad and ‘permanent returns’ with a re-settlement in the country of origin for good (King, 2000). King (2000) maintains that “there is a symbolic relationship between these return periods and the types of migration that lead up to, or are co-involved with, the return moves”. In the case of refugees, the general context imposes a very different experience. It is often impossible to visit the country of origin while being in exile and it can be extremely difficult to maintain contacts with families and friends. When talking about temporary short visits in this case we are mainly dealing with return under conflict or post-conflict explorative visits which entail a completely different scenario.

The third and fourth typologies can be considered jointly in relation to refugee issues. The third typology presented by King is the one proposed by Bovenkerk (1974) and developed by Gmelch (1980). It is based on the analysis of observed behaviour by comparing the initial intentions of the migrants with the eventual migration outcome. Four possible cases are distinguished: 1) migrants who emigrate with the intention of returning and who do in fact return; 2) intended temporary migration without return; 3) intended permanent migration followed by return; 4) intended permanent migration without return (King, 2000). The fourth typology was developed by Cerase (1974) on the thesis that “the type of return and the post-return impact of migrants depend largely on the stage in the process of acculturation that the migrant has reached in the country

of emigration” (King, 1986, p.14). Among the causes for return migrations he highlights some contrasting situations that might lead to the same decision to return such as: a sense of failure for not having achieved the initial goals or the anticipated successful experience in the receiving country, the conservative attachment to the values of the society of origin or the spirit of innovation and, finally, the wish to retire in the country of origin (Richmond, 1983). In the case of refugees the use of either the approach of Bovenkerk (1974) and Gmelch (1980), which calls for comparing people’s initial intentions with the eventual outcome of migration, or the evaluation of the migration process by Cerase (1974) is possible only if we consider the specific political nature of the refugee movements out of their country of origin and its influence on the whole experience of exile abroad and on the refugees’ decision to stay abroad or repatriate.

3.2.3 Refugee return: a special case

The analysis of these general typologies of repatriation in relation to refugee repatriation supports the opinion that although many aspects of the return process apply equally to both refugees and other migrants, the different kinds of events that led to the flight are likely to pervade the qualitative nature of the mode of repatriation from the decision-making phase to the actual return movement and reintegration phase in the country of origin. Refugees who have to decide to go back to their country of origin do not have to ponder solely their ‘personal aspirations’ in the light of the information available on wider structural conditions as suggested by Koser (1993) and their repatriation process cannot be explained in its complexity applying the ‘push-pull’ rational to the return phase.

In conclusion, there are several elements that differentiate a refugee from a labour migrant in the experience out of the country of origin that are then reflected in the process of repatriation. For example, the refugee faces personal traumas and a constant fear of returning to a still hostile environment; a sharp division often separates those who went in exile and those who ‘compromised’ and stayed at home (Arowolo, 2000); during the time spent out of the country of origin the ongoing conflict makes any attempt to keep in touch with the community at home quite difficult; the conflict prevents the refugee

from visiting friends and families and its aftermath, often, redefines the whole concept of home. Moreover, the term 'refugee' is generally used to describe people fleeing from different sorts of persecutions, with different positions within a given conflict and with various legal, social and political experiences during their exile. Thus, when it comes to return, we can expect a more differentiated range of reactions and behaviours peculiar to the different types of refugees involved.

All these elements indicate the need for the study of refugee repatriation as a distinct issue within return migration. Therefore, the paucity of theoretical developments in contrast to a predominant growing body of literature on specific cases and aspects of the issue needs to be tackled. The studies currently available are, in the main, focused on repatriation movements from/to/in specific geographic locations (often African refugee repatriations); exploring the legal implications, evaluating projects run by governments and international organisations, studying the phenomenon in the context of conflict resolutions and so on. There is a collection of various data, with a mainly descriptive nature, whose sociological value is highly questionable if "they remain in the form of particulars and are not brought into the framework of substantive theory" (McKinney, 1966, p.88). In this respect, UNHCR's statement in the 1993 State of the World's Refugees affirming that "although every repatriation movement is unique, they all share some common characteristics" (UNHCR, 1993) can be considered as encouraging for work aiming to provide more generalised explanations of refugee repatriation issues. While remarking on the peculiarity and the very specific character of each repatriation movement, the UNHCR's statement stresses the existence of common features that can provide fertile grounds for theoretical elaboration on the subject. Academic developments in this area could contribute to a clearer understanding of refugee repatriation and provide key interpretative tools able to promote a better approach to the phenomenon. Among the few academic attempts in this direction the most relevant studies are: the typologies of repatriation of Cuny and Stein (1992); the work of Koser (1993) on repatriation and information system; the typology of repatriation of Collins (1996). These studies are reviewed in the following sections and their contribution to the study of refugee repatriation is explored in relation to certain key aspects of the research topic such as the development of typologies of repatriation, its relation to other aspects of

the exile experience, the time and space factors, the decision-making process and the voluntary/involuntary repatriation paradigm.

3.3 Repatriation within the larger context of the exile experience: learning from existing typologies

Repatriation can be approached from different perspectives and the development of types and models depends, of course, on the aspects of the phenomenon that are being analysed. Certain models or typologies focus on the operational aspects of the process and are useful tools for the description and comparison of different movements, while others try to investigate the reasons behind certain patterns of repatriation in an attempt to develop more interpretative tools. A good example is that of Cuny and Stein's two typologies of repatriation that reflect these two alternative routes. The first typology is a good tool for describing and comparing different operational aspects of repatriation movements, while the second provides the basis for a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the ways in which certain repatriation processes take place and emphasises the importance of the larger context of the whole exile experience.

Cuny and Stein criticise any rigid division into categories of repatriation stating that: "to a certain degree, it is better to avoid labelling types of repatriation and to concentrate instead on examining the range of repatriation experiences" (Cuny and Stein, 1991, p.4). The approach suggested by the two authors considers that it is "useful to describe a repatriation experience with respect to where it falls along one or more continuums or spectrums" (Cuny and Stein, 1991, p.4). In line with this, they distinguish different fundamental variables, necessary to the study of repatriation, such as the level of organisation, the number of refugees involved in the movement and the refugees' level of participation in the decision-making process. These variables label the two ends of a continuum.

Referring to the description of each variable considered in Cuny and Stein's study I propose below a graphic representation of what could be called a 'spectrum model of repatriation'.

In order to provide an example I refer to the authors’ analysis of the level of organisation in the process of repatriation. Their own words can explain Figure 3.1:

“[...] one continuum might begin with unorganised, unassisted repatriation at one end and continue to organised, internationally assisted repatriation at the other end. In between are repatriations which are organised or assisted to varying degrees by the refugees themselves or various local or international actors.” (Cuny and Stein, 1991, p.4)

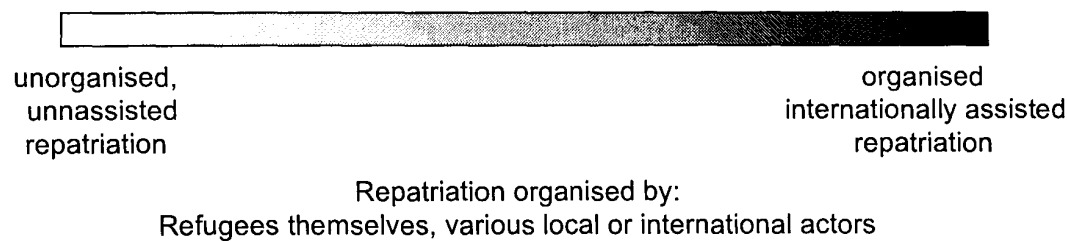


FIGURE 3.1: Spectrum of the level of organisation in refugee repatriation movements

Similarly, it is possible to represent the multiple shadows of possibilities described by Cuny and Stein (1991) when they refer to the number of refugees involved in a repatriation movement (individual, families, small groups, collective movement) or to the degree of ‘voluntariness’ (voluntary, encouraged, induced, forced) in the decision to repatriate.

This approach has been developed following a bipolar type of formulation based on the idea that it is useful to distinguish opposite types of social organisations in order to establish a range within which intermediate forms can be comprehended (McKinney, 1966). The development of such a typology though does not avoid labelling types of repatriation as the authors seem to suggest, thus overcoming the general use of ideal types in the analysis of repatriation, since the two extremes are, in fact, ideal or constructed types themselves. In this case McKinney explains:

“The types establish the outer limits, or standards, by means of which the processes of change or intermediate structural forms can be comprehended from the perspective of the continuum. It is in this sense that general types, [...] continue to play an important role in sociological analysis.” (McKinney, 1966, p.101)

The advantage of using polar typologies is that the notion of social continuum represents a crucial criterion for the advancement of comparative studies (McKinney, 1966). The model derived from Cuny and Stein's analysis can facilitate the task of describing specific cases of refugee repatriation, it can simplify comparative studies of different movements and it can provide the necessary elements to construct more detailed categories of modes of repatriation. However, this kind of typology can only be a starting point for research in the field since it can only provide a descriptive analysis of the movements and cannot give an account of the dynamics lying behind a specific case or determine the reasons why a given repatriation movement takes place under certain modalities and presents certain characteristics.

These problems are partly overcome by the authors at a later stage in the same study (Cuny and Stein, 1991) where they propose another kind of differentiation of repatriation movements. The categories are now distinguished by positioning the phenomenon within the entire chain of events that characterise the refugee's experience. The authors identify four patterns of repatriation: ricochet repatriation; relocation-stimulated repatriation; community and alienation; major repatriation. In their explanation and definition of each category they first analyse the way refugees related to the conflict before the flight, and subsequently evaluate the situations under which they fled, finally, they examine the conditions of settlement in exile and their relationship with the entire refugee community. Through such a broader view of the issue they are able to draw some general conclusions and suggest the way in which a specific group of people is more likely to repatriate. For example, when defining what is intended by 'ricochet' repatriation they notice that in cases where the exodus is sudden, usually due to military action, some refugees, who have not felt personally threatened or persecuted and whose ideas do not coincide with those of the majority of refugees, will immediately seek ways to return. Moreover, in these cases the initial repatriations will be spontaneous and mostly unassisted.

Another example is given by the explanation for the category 'community and alienation', where they analyse a common case among refugee groups that is the "formation of politically organised communities by uprooted peoples" (Cuny and Stein, 1991, p.6). Often perceived by the host governments as part of homogeneous groups, people are

“placed in unaccustomed communal situations which may change their way of life and crowd them in with strangers” (Cuny and Stein, 1991, p.6). In this context some refugees will feel alienated from the values and the cause of the emerging community. They will be “seeking control over their own lives” and they “are likely to move away from the camp or settlement or to repatriate” (Cuny and Stein, 1991, p.6).

The examples, offered by Cuny and Stein’s work, show the significance of both an individual and a collective background in the study of repatriation and highlight the fact that a group of refugee escaping from the same conflict and fleeing under the same conditions is composed of individuals whose diverse ideas and reactions in front of a given situation cause them to deal with exile and repatriation (when this is the case) in different ways.

These views offer an alternative to the vast majority of research approaches to refugee return whose pitfalls are summarised by Sepulveda: “Repatriation in policy, practice and research tends to be treated as a unified, monolithic experience” thus “[...] unable to accommodate the complexities of actors, means and ends - central components of any contemporary repatriation movement” (Sepulveda, 1995, p.84).

From a methodological point of view Cuny and Stein’s study stresses the importance of connecting repatriation to the chain of events that preceded it and to those that follow it. Linking the process of the flight to the experience in the country of reception or settlement represents the basis for a comprehensive research on refugees in general and on refugee repatriation in particular. Until recently, researchers studied refugees either in the country of origin and in flight or in their experience in the land of exile (Kunz, 1973; Joly, 2002)]. Joly argues that this kind of approach makes it impossible to progress in the understanding of the refugees’ situation (Joly, 2002). As she points out, Kunz was the first scholar in refugee studies who addressed his research towards this direction. In his article on exile and resettlement, Kunz stresses that “in the resettlement phase many of the refugees’ problems could be traced back to their emotional links with and dependence on their past” (Kunz, 1981, p.42). In fact, in the article he classifies refugees into two groups derived from refugees’ attitudes towards their displacement: “reactive fate groups and purpose groups which include self-fulfilling groups and revolutionary

activists" (Joly, 2002, p.8).

Using a similar historical approach, Zolberg et al. (1989) develop a typology of refugees based on the hypothesis that refugees are a result of social conflicts. He looks at the refugees' position within a conflict and distinguishes three categories: activists, targets and victims. The first type, 'the activist', refers to refugees who are engaged in "some politically significant activity that the state seeks to extinguish", the second type, 'the target', refers to those refugees that by misfortune belong "to a social or cultural group that has been singled out for the abuse of state power" and the third type, 'the victim', includes the "persons displaced by societal or international violence that is not necessarily directed to them as individuals but makes life in their own country impossible". Accepting this hypothesis and beginning from these initial considerations, Joly (2002) proposes an analysis of the modes of settlement in relation to the refugees' position within the conflict that caused their exile. She looks at them as social actors and studies the way their attitude and their subjective relation towards the conflict influence the reformulation of their position in the country of reception. She distinguishes two types of refugees in the land of exile: Odyssean and Rubicon refugees. The first type refers to actors who were positively involved in the political struggle and committed to a project of society in the country of origin. This group carries the project in exile and shapes settlement around a strong homeland oriented project. The second type refers to those actors who are very attached to the culture of origin and to their kin still living in the country of origin but are not committed to a common home oriented project. These refugees perceive exile as something definitive and are most likely to engage in projects oriented towards improving the conditions of settlement and maintaining solid group identity in the host country. By looking at the correlation between the circumstances preceding and following exile, the author identifies the different paths and strategies followed by the two groups in their patterns of group formation and social interaction with the society of the host country. Moreover, she captures the reasons behind the different ways in which the two types are influenced by the structure of the reception society and she remarks that the two main categories are not static as particular groups and individuals from any group may change category because of a number of factors.

Considering the process of repatriation as a further step beyond the settlement in the host country, it is possible to analyse the issue in the light of this framework. This theoretical approach could be an effective starting point towards a more comprehensive study of repatriation. I am not simply suggesting that Odyssean refugees want to and do repatriate, while Rubicon refugees do not want to and do not repatriate, I am more interested in the general idea of analysing the impact of the relationship between the refugees and the conflict they escaped from with their mode of settlement in exile and their decision about return.

Therefore, I am advocating for the use of the theoretical grounding provided by Cuny and Stein (1991), Kunz (1973), Zolberg et al. (1989) and Joly (2002) when analysing the phenomenon of refugee repatriation by studying it within the larger context of the experience of exile. Within this frame the question ‘Who is returning Where?’ becomes crucial before analysing any return movement. It is important to consider how the conditions of the country of origin have been changed by the conflict and how the experience of exile has changed and influenced the refugees as groups and as individuals. Therefore, the indispensable variables of time and space should be considered in their qualitative impact on people’s lives.

3.3.1 The Impact of Time and Space on the experience of exile

Human geographers have dealt with the factors of ‘Time and Space’ in the study of return migration. Velikonja indicates how “the time related assessment and the territorial impact of return migration reflects the impact of separation either by time or by spatial distance” and adds that “the probability of interaction declines with time or space distance and the impact of separation similarly increases with either time or space interval” (Velikonja, 1983, p.247).

These considerations must also be explored when analysing refugee repatriation movements. If we simplify the process of exile to a single-step move from the land of origin (A) to the land of settlement (B) we could represent the move as in Figure 3.2

Consequently, we might assume that repatriation constitutes the opposite move from the



FIGURE 3.2: Return: a simplified single-step move

country of settlement (B) to the country of origin (A) as the dashed arrow in Figure 3.3 shows:



FIGURE 3.3: Return and space: simplified repatriation movement

However the place where refugees are returning to is not in the same conditions as it was when they left. We must keep into account the crucial effects of time on the process that is more realistically represented in Figure 3.4 where the indispensable dimension of time is considered.

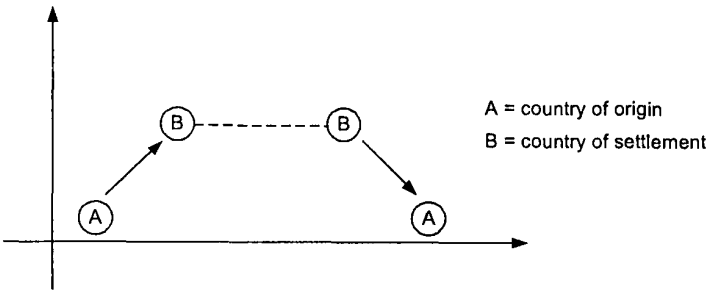


FIGURE 3.4: Return, time and space

The above figure shows that repatriation cannot be described as a return to ‘before the conflict took place’ and as a way to cancel the past and forget about the traumas of exile. Neither the society that the refugees have left behind has remained static (Chepulis, 1983), nor have the returnees remained uninfluenced by the experience of exile, which implies a change in life style and living conditions, to say the least (Arowolo, 2000). Consequently, the phenomenon should be examined from a different perspective considering the changes brought by the conflict in the country of origin and in the refugees’ life experience during a determined duration of time.

Refugee repatriation is part of a chain of events, some of which preceded and influenced it, others that followed and are influenced by it. Chepulis (1983) suggests that when studying return migrations, in general, it is crucial to consider the historical context, since return migration is only one part of the whole migration process, which is

interlinked to much larger transnational processes and it is, therefore, necessary to understand the articulation and disarticulation between the various levels in producing the causes and effects of both migration and return migration.

3.4 Analysing theoretical models of refugee repatriation decision-making processes

So far I have argued for the need to investigate refugee repatriation as a distinct case of return migration. Moreover, based on the review of existing work I identified the advantages of studying refugee repatriation within the general context of the experience of exile, paying particular attention to the temporal and spatial dimensions involved. In this section I focus on the specific study of refugee decision-making processes vis-à-vis return starting with a review of the information and decision-making models of Koser (1993) and Collins (1996), and analysing the implications of using rational choice theory approaches to explain the process.

Hammond has criticized the academic focus on the study of refugees' decision-making processes in relation to return. She remarks that:

“In the study of repatriation, the lion’s share of attention has been placed on examining either the decision to repatriate (particularly identifying the factors that go into electing to return and determining whether such decisions are voluntary), or the actual repatriation movement from the country of exile to the country of origin. While such areas of enquiry are obviously valid, there has been a virtual neglect of the later stages of repatriation, in which returnees attempt to establish themselves socially, economically and politically in their areas of return.” (Hammond, 1999, p.227)

While these words support the opinion that more aspects of refugee repatriation need to be researched and that overall the subject needs to be approached from new perspectives, they do not imply that other aspects have been thoroughly and satisfactorily

investigated. In fact, while the studies on the refugee's decision-making process about repatriating have taken the first steps towards a better theoretical understanding of the issue, they are still far from finding satisfactory answers.

The study of the dynamics lying behind refugees' decisions to repatriate or settle in the country of exile is necessary when trying to understand whether integration or repatriation can enable them to escape what I call the 'doubleE-condition', that is the condition of being refugees or returnees, and let them enter a more stable life as any citizen of any state. Only a deep understanding of the dynamics leading to the decision to return can offer the indispensable key to the complexity of the post-repatriation world. The decision to repatriate is the starting point of a new drastic change in a refugee's life. It represents the choice of a new migration whose influencing factors are most likely to shape the moment of transition and the modes of settlement in the 'new' country of origin.

3.4.1 Koser's information and decision-making model

Koser (1993) develops a model of refugee information system based on some of the key concepts of rational choice theory. The model aims at providing "a possible framework with which to analyse whether and how potential repatriates are receiving information about safe areas at home upon which to base their own decision to return" (Koser, 1993, p.180).

The model presented in Figure 3.5, considers:

- the conditions in the country of origin as sources of information;
- the agents transmitting the information to the refugees in exile and
- the refugees' reception of the information in the host country.

In the process of deciding whether to repatriate or not, the refugee compares the flows of information received about the country of origin with the situation in exile. When the benefits of going back to the country of origin outweigh those of staying in exile

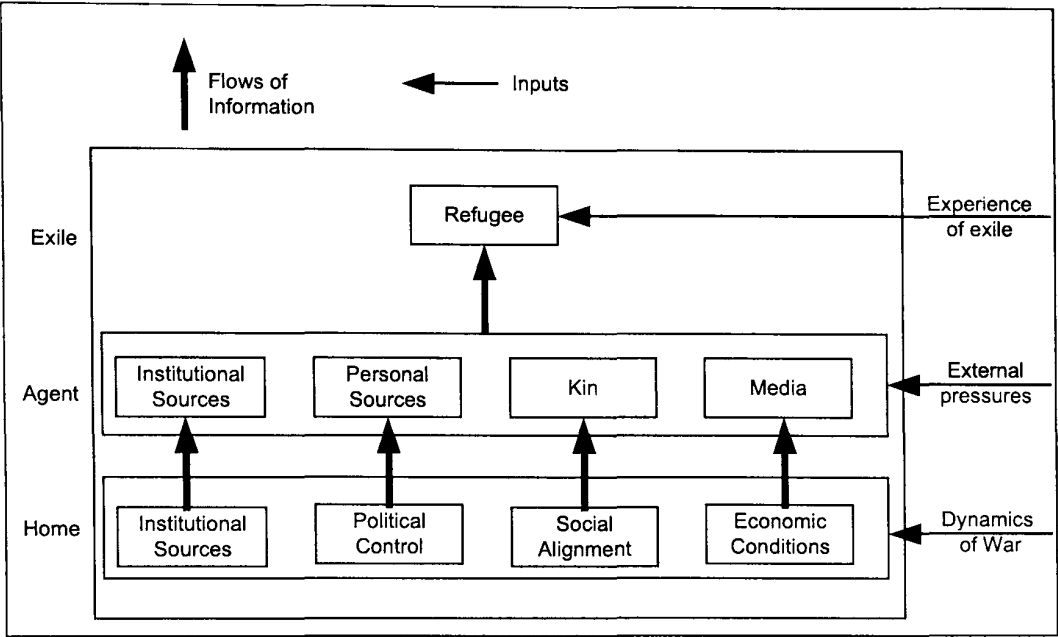


FIGURE 3.5: Koser’s Model of Refugee Information System

repatriation takes place. Koser himself points at some fundamental weaknesses in the model, namely: “a) refugees passively receive information; b) refugees are static in exile; c) refugees receive information as individuals and d) refugees want to return to the place from which they came” (Koser, 1993, p.176). Moreover, through his self-criticism the author brings examples that contradict each of these assumptions.

Koser’s model has been analysed, criticised and further developed by Collins (1996) in his work on repatriation in Africa. Collins appreciates Koser’s pioneering contribution to the study of the decision-making process in refugee repatriation movements. However, he agrees with the author’s self-critique about the limits presented by the model and adds two further considerations: 1) the model ignores the fact that some refugees go back temporarily for exploratory trips to the country of origin in order to assess personally the conditions in the country before the final repatriation; 2) the model does not explore the issue of ‘free/not free’ choice in the refugees’ decision to return.

3.4.2 Collins’s information and decision-making model

Collins (1996) develops an alternative model, illustrated in Figure 3.6 in an attempt to overcome some of the limitations discussed above.

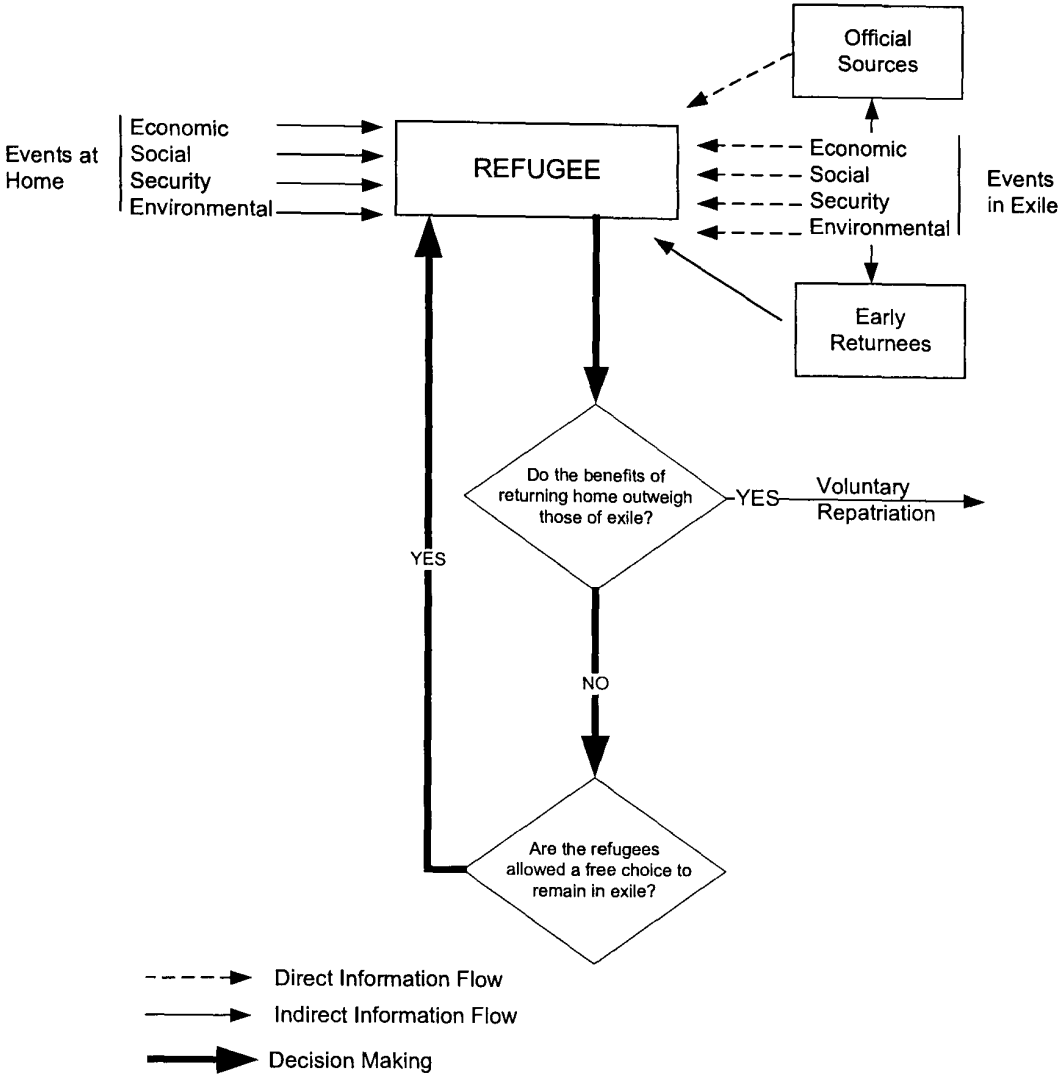


FIGURE 3.6: Collins’s Information and Decision-Making model

The first important innovation introduced by this model is the differentiation between direct and indirect flows of information. It is imagined that different levels of accuracy and trustworthiness characterise these two different kinds of information. Official indirect sources are more likely to be of a general nature and to be suspected of hiding all sorts of political interests while the news derived from a direct experience (early returnees, explorative trips, contacts with those who did not leave, etc.) allow the refugees to verify the authenticity and reliability of the official news and provide them with more specific targeted information (the specific condition of the area, town or village of origin, the conditions of friends and relatives, job opportunities, etc.). Although Collins’s model does not tackle the distinction of the different impact of the two types of information on the decision-making process from a qualitative point of view, it represents an important step forward in this theoretical development. With his model, he brings into question the concept of freedom of refugees’ choice to return, considering the debate

about voluntary and involuntary repatriation of crucial importance for the analysis of the dynamics underpinning the decision-making process.

Overall, Koser's assumptions that refugees are static in exile and receive information in a passive way are partly overcome by Collins's work. However, the main limitations of both models are actually given by the application of some of the basic concepts of rational choice theory to this issue as I explain below in more detail.

3.4.3 Rational choice theory and refugees' choice

Although there are several versions of this theory (the classical maximization approach, the stochastic game theory model, the theory of bounded rationality), the overarching principle is that individuals act for a particular purpose and have hierarchically ordered sets of utilities. Consequently, they make rational calculations in regard to: the utility of alternative behaviour with reference to the preference hierarchy; the costs of each alternative in terms of lost utilities; the best way to maximize utility. It follows that emergent social phenomena – social structures, collective decisions, and collective behaviour – are the outcome of rational choices made by utility-maximizing individuals (Turner, 1997).

Originally derived from the British utilitarian tradition, rational choice theory developed in statistical decision theory and economics and has spread to many other disciplines over the last five decades (e.g. political science, anthropology, organisation theory, criminology, social psychology). Its application in sociological studies is not new and it is "one of the most significant and controversial developments in contemporary sociological theory" (Zafirovski, 1999, p.1). Therefore, the use of this theoretical approach in the analysis of refugees' decision-making processes in relation to return brings along the limitations and the controversies that have already stemmed from the application of rational choice theory in sociological analysis. As Martinelli explains:

"[...]on the one hand, it is recognized that rational choice can describe, analyse and predict individual behaviour in a wide array of different situations and contexts of action. [...] On the other hand, rational choice is criticized as too unilateral and incapable of accounting for the basic sociological questions

of social order and social change; and it is judged hardly useful when collectivities instead of individuals, and macro-level structures and institutions instead of micro-level action, are to be analysed.” (Martinelli, 2004)

A prominent example of how the rational choice paradigm has been used to set the basis of a general sociological theory is Coleman’s work. For Coleman the ‘individual person’ (or ‘natural person’, ‘concrete person’, or ‘personal actor’), that he considers to be the natural unit of observation, acts purposively, rationally, and ‘unconstrained by norms’, with the aim of pursuing his self-interest and seeking pleasure (Martinelli, 2004). Starting from these assumptions, Coleman develops a general theory of social action and pushes it so far as to cover all empirical cases. This is one of the most criticised points of his work, along with what his critics consider a double neglect of historical and social differences and the underestimated role of norms and collective identities (Martinelli, 2004). The general critiques are summarised by Himmelweit when she states that it should be recognised “that rational choice models are not the best way to analyse ‘non-economic’ phenomena” (Himmelweit, 1999, p.1).

The main question is ‘Can we legitimately apply rational choice theory to all research issues and to all problems?’ Boudon answers by pointing out that:

“Rational choice theory assumes that individual action is instrumental, namely that it has to be explained by the actors’ will to reach certain goals. Now, action can be noninstrumental, as most sociologists have recognised. Schütz, through his distinction between *Weil* and *Wozu* motive, and Weber, through his distinction between instrumental and axiological rationality, have stressed that action is not always instrumental. If the instrumentality of action is indeed limited, then rational choice theory cannot claim to be a general theory of action.” (Boudon, 1998, p.818)

For example, in his work Coleman goes so far as to explain slavery within the rational choice paradigm; according to him it is rational to accept slavery, since it is a condition preferable to death. Coleman’s account of slavery is based on the assumption that remaining alive is the ultimate goal for an individual and that therefore any condition

keeping him/her alive is preferable to death (Martinelli, 2004). Once we accept this assumption we can validate the use of rational choice theory to explain the fact that being a slave is preferable to death. However, we are aware of several historical cases when for instance suicide has been considered as a preferable alternative to slavery: suicide is clearly prohibited by Judaism, however, the mass suicides occurred in 73 AD at Masada when 960 Jews killed themselves rather than face enslavement by Roman captors is still regarded as an enduring symbol of the Jewish struggle for national independence. Moreover, other instances show that life is not always a priority for individuals: in ancient Egypt people considered suicide a humane way to escape intolerable conditions; for centuries in Japan people respected instances of *hara-kiri* (ritual suicide with a dagger) as a way for a shamed individual to make amends for failure or desertion of duty; during World War II Japanese Kamikaze pilots considered it an honour to perform suicidal missions by crashing their airplanes into an enemy target; and more recently we have witnessed cases of suicide bombers in Israel, Russia, Morocco or in the United States to name a few.

These simple considerations indicate that once we know what the set of priorities of an individual is we can analyse his/her actions and decisions by applying the rational choice paradigm and explain that subject X has done Y rather than Y' because Y was more advantageous. However, this approach does not tell us how this individual has come to decide about those priorities and determine the ultimate goals.

Boudon (1998) observes that it is not possible to apply rational choice theory in all those cases when “an actor does X because he believes in Z and Z implies his doing X independently of the consequences of X” (Boudon, 1998, p.817). Even in those instances when action is instrumental, it has to be admitted that it can mobilize beliefs that need to be explained and that normally will not be explained by rational choice theory.

This is the case of refugee decision-making processes vis-à-vis the choice of repatriation. I consider Koser and Collins's models important steps towards a better theoretical understanding of the topic and interesting starting points for the development of the theoretical debate on the subject. However, in the case of refugee repatriation the application of the rational choice paradigm to the decision-making process carries all the

limitations discussed above and fails in considering all those instances when the individual might choose the less ‘beneficial’ options simply because of beliefs, fears, emotional factors and other elements that cannot be explained in terms of rational utilitarianism. When dealing with political activists with strong faith in their cause, with people who have lost their beloved and their belongings or with those traumatised by violence, we are most likely to find rational choice theory of little help.

As Martinelli remarks:

“Rational choice theory should be seen as just one of the theoretical frameworks which can be employed in the interpretation and explanation of concrete social phenomena, alongside others, such a variety of institutionalist, culturalist and structuralist approaches. Sociological theorizing should proceed according to a ‘toolkit view’ rather than a ‘general theory’ perspective.” (Martinelli, 2004)

I propose later in this chapter a different approach to the study of refugees’ decision-making processes with regard to return. However, before doing this, I explore the distinction between voluntary and involuntary repatriation which plays a central role in the debate about refugees’ repatriation decision-making processes and the complex nature of the reasons behind the choice to settle or repatriate. The following section deals with this distinction and the research problems related to it.

3.5 Voluntary or involuntary repatriation

One of the most problematic issues related to refugee repatriation is the differentiation of refugee return movements into ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ repatriations.

It is commonly understood that ‘voluntary repatriation’ indicates those cases when a person chooses to return to the home country of his/her own will and that, on the contrary, ‘involuntary repatriation’ indicates the instances when a person is forced to return to the home country against his/her will. This simple distinction is commonly

used in politics, in the media and in the jargon of national and international humanitarian agencies. However, there are obvious questionmarks related to the definition of 'voluntariness', since there is no single working definition held by all agencies. Considering the existing use of the expression 'voluntary repatriation', Morris states that there are approximately three gradations of what 'voluntariness' is considered to mean:

“Definition one: Voluntary return represents a clear and open choice on behalf of the refugee to either return to their country of origin or stay and more permanently integrate into the host society.

Definition two: Voluntary return represents a choice between returning to the country of origin in a voluntary fashion now (perhaps with financial or other incentives) versus staying and risking forcible return by the host Government.

Definition three: Voluntary return represents the absence of force. 'Voluntariness' exists when the migrant's free will is expressed at least through the absence of refusal to return, e.g. by not resisting to board transportation or not otherwise manifesting disagreement.”

(Morris, 2000, p.9)

Therefore, the problem of a common definition exists and it is also undermined by some more general questions: What do we mean by 'free choice'? And more precisely, how can we distinguish a 'voluntary' action from an 'involuntary' one?

These questions pervade the whole debate around refugee repatriation and have political, legal and social implications linked to the difficulties of understanding whether the refugee is at risk and needs to be protected from *refoulement* when dealing with voluntary/involuntary repatriation (Takahashi, 1997).

Consequently, most of the humanitarian agencies involved in refugee repatriation movements have felt the need to define what they meant by 'voluntary repatriation' and have often put together definitions, rules and requirements in official documents, guidelines, policy papers and handbooks in the attempt to set the boundaries of their actions and

avoid the accusation of forcibly returning refugees. The most significant guide is the UNHCR's Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation promoting the idea of repatriation taking place on a 'wholly voluntary basis' in conditions of 'safety and dignity' (UNHCR, 1996).

3.5.1 The academic debate on Voluntary/Involuntary repatriation

The academic debate presents different approaches to the problem. For instance, the legal approach to the subject focuses on the delicate debate about the distinction between the right to return and the right to *non-refoulement*.

From a sociological point of view the question is more complicated since the task is not that of establishing useful operational or legal definitions, but that of studying and understanding the phenomenon in its various developments. It is not possible in sociology to refer to concepts such as 'freedom and will' as terms with static clear-cut meanings. As Cuny and Stein point out, even in cases of spontaneous refugee return movements "although many people think of voluntary repatriation as a purely 'voluntary' act reflecting the individual will of the refugee, in practice the decision to return is often initiated from outside - is brought about by outside persuasion, influence, and even pressure" (Cuny and Stein, 1990, p.307).

3.5.2 Collins's Typology of repatriation

Collins has explored the complex dilemma of defining voluntary and involuntary repatriation by developing a typology of repatriation based on his study of repatriation in Africa. His analysis of the definition of voluntary and involuntary types of repatriation is based on the dialectic of relationship between what he calls a 'free' or 'controlled' refugee's 'social context' and a 'free' or 'controlled' refugee's 'external' context. He explains that the two measures, free and controlled, "are not absolute and can vary between individual refugees and between individual contexts" (Collins, 1996, p.58).

With the term 'social context', Collins refers to the events in exile and especially to the combination of three variables: kinship ties, economic status in exile, security in exile.

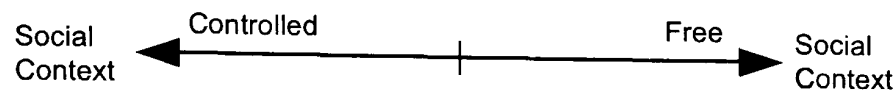


FIGURE 3.7: Collins: Social Context

In order to explain what is meant by the two opposite conditions, ‘free’ and ‘controlled’ as illustrated in Figure 3.7, he argues that:

“When, on balance, refugees have control over their own economic security and family life, then their social context can be considered free. On the other hand, when external agencies or forces have the most input into all aspects of the refugees’ lives, then their social context could be classified as controlled.” (Collins, 1996, p.58)

By ‘external’ context, Figure 3.8, the author refers almost entirely to the situation in the area of origin and looks into these three variables: security at home, economic conditions at home, infrastructures at home.

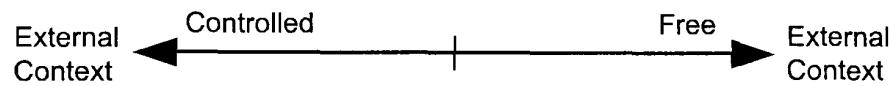


FIGURE 3.8: Collins: External Context

He considers that even in this case where “the extent to which the elements of the external context are controlled or free determines whether or not the repatriation is in fact voluntary” (Collins, 1996, p.58). When explaining the variables of the social context and those of the external context, Collins clearly draws his examples from the African scene. In fact, in his analysis of the social context he refers to African cultures in order to explain some of the complexities characterising the ‘kinship ties’ variable and he discusses the economic situations in both contexts by focusing on the importance of agriculture and the examples of refugee migrations to Kenya and Zaire. However, from a more abstract point of view his division of the spheres of influence into social and external context could be applied to any repatriation movement if the characteristics of the two contexts were consciously redefined according to the peculiarity of the cases under analysis.

The typology of repatriation of Collins (1996), outlined in Figure 3.9, “uses the previ-

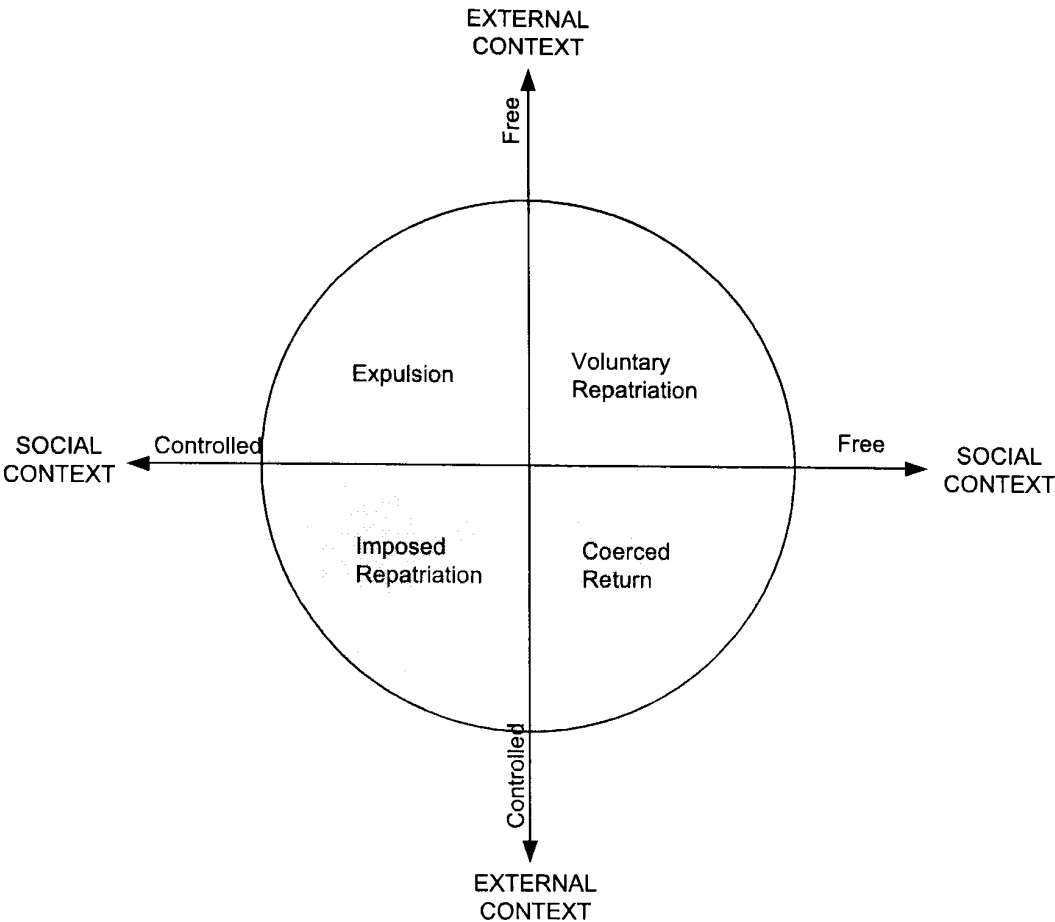


FIGURE 3.9: Collins’s typology of repatriation

ously described social and external contexts as the primary test of voluntariness” (Collins, 1996, p.65). The two contexts are graphically represented by two crossed axes whose intersection results into four areas representing distinct types of repatriation. Three of these types of refugee return migration are classified as involuntary repatriation (coerced return, imposed repatriation, expulsion), while only one is considered voluntary repatriation.

According to Collins’s typology, we deal with a completely free decision only in those cases where both, the social and external contexts are free. In his own words:

“Refugees whose social contexts are free are able to make an informed decision to return home. The refugees are granted the opportunity to remain in exile; no pressure is brought to bear on their immediate economic or security situations. Refugees who are members of vulnerable groups are provided with appropriate assistance to help them return home.” (Collins, 1996, p.66).

Moreover, he stresses how in cases of voluntary repatriation, security issues at home

should be resolved to the complete satisfaction of the refugees, how programs to identify and clear possible minefields should be undertaken and, if necessary, development projects should be targeted at providing repaired and upgraded infrastructures.

The other three types of repatriation depend on Collins's assumption that all cases where either one of the two contexts or both are 'controlled' have to be considered as involuntary forms of repatriation leaving the refugees without a 'real' free choice. The definitions of 'coerced return', 'imposed repatriation' and 'expulsion' selected by Collins to distinguish these three types can give rise to confusion. Actually, the three terms can be considered as synonymous since they all refer to the act of 'compelling, forcing, obliging somebody to do something'. The way in which each term has been attached to a specific situation described in the typology is completely arbitrary.

The main weaknesses of Collins's typology, though, are the limited range of variables considered when describing the factors influencing the refugees' decisions and the simplistic character of the definition of 'free' or 'controlled' contexts in both country of exile and of origin with its consequent distinctions between voluntary or involuntary repatriation. A free environment cannot simply correspond to a situation "where refugees control their economy, security and family life and when external agencies or forces have no influence in their lives" (Collins, 1996, p.58). This kind of situation is difficult to distinguish in real life. The definition of 'control' is very controversial when trying, for example, to understand when we can claim to have control over our economic situation: Is it when we have permission to work, though we cannot easily find a job? Or when we have a job providing us with a salary but unrelated to our qualifications? Or when the job corresponds to our level of qualifications and somebody employs us? Or when we have an autonomous job?

The same sort of doubts and questions could derive even from each of the other variables. For instance, it is similarly complicated to understand what is meant by not being influenced by external agencies or forces and how can we ever be sure not to be influenced by other people's opinion, by the mass media, by national or international policies. The personal relationship with these 'external' inputs is one of the most difficult to analyse and study.

The strongest point in the development of his typology of repatriation is the fact that Collins points indirectly at the need for researching repatriation by considering the interplay of structural factors with people's agency. I develop my research within this frame leaving aside the problem of confronting the 'voluntary versus involuntary' repatriation debate. Obviously, this issue is part of a much larger sociological debate about 'freedom and constraint' and in the specific case of repatriation the line between the two will always be difficult to draw and it is likely to move according to one's perspective. Therefore the aim of the thesis is rather that of investigating the dynamics that lay at the basis of refugees' decision to either settle in the country of exile or return to the country of origin. The goal is that of acknowledging and understanding the factors that influence the decision-making process and the way in which refugees relate to them. I leave the codification of standards, definition and rules about voluntary and involuntary repatriation to practitioners.

In order to do this, in the following section I argue for the advantage of using Archer's approach to the theoretical structure and agency debate, which more than the classic collectivist or individualist approach, or contemporary structuration theory, enables me to investigate the interaction between conditions in the host country and refugees in relation to their choice vis-à-vis return.

3.6 Repatriation, structure and agency

Obviously, investigating refugees' choice to repatriate means dealing with the dual, contradictory nature of the human condition torn between autonomy and constraint, freedom and dependence, individuality and participation, therefore, it is useful to refer to the general sociological debate on structure and agency in order to understand how to explore the subject within this frame.

Richmond states:

"An adequate sociological theory of migration must incorporate an understanding of social action and human agency, the question of conflict, con-

tradition and opposition in social systems, the meaning of structure and change, and the importance of power.” (Richmond, 1989, p.17)

In the following sections I examine the major issues related to refugee repatriation from these perspectives. It is not in the scope of the thesis to elaborate on this core issue of sociological theorizing; I do not propose a revisited account of the development of this debate or an abstract critique of the different approaches. However, I present the main academic standpoints (collectivism, individualism, structuralism, realism) through a brief overview of the positions of some of the major exponents (Durkheim, Weber, Giddens, Archer). This review is necessary in order to explain the reasons why I consider sociological realism (especially Archer’s exploration of analytical dualism and her methodological ‘morphogenetic approach’) to be a suitable theory for application to the specific research issue of refugee repatriation.

3.6.1 The structure and agency debate

As Sztompka puts it:

“All our life we feel the oppressive presence of what Ralf Dahrendorf calls the ‘vexatious fact of society’, we feel bound by norms, rules, traditions, expectations and requirements, and occasionally hit our heads against the hard wall of social sanctions. [...] But at the same time we perceive ourselves as persons, unique individuals with identity, integrity, independence, freedom. We profess some level of control over our actions, feel responsible for our decisions, experience pride, guilt and shame.” (Sztompka, 1991, p.16)

Being a refugee is not an exception. All the main experiences related to the conditions during the pre-exile time, the life in exile and the possible repatriation phase, are embedded in the everyday human struggle between freedom and constraint. This positions the research problem at the centre of the classic sociological dilemma of structure and agency.

“The relation of the social order and the individual being, the relation of the unit and the whole” (Nadel, 1957, p.401) or simply the ‘Structure-Agency’ question has concerned theoretically oriented sociology for decades and is considered one of the fundamental theoretical questions in the human sciences by several sociologists (Archer, 1995; Carl-snaes, 1992; Giddens, Giddens; McAnulla, 1992). The classic academic debate has seen the opposition of two distinguished approaches: a collectivist standpoint, resting on the claim that social wholes are something more than the sum of the individuals involved and have their own specific mode of existence, and an individualist approach, believing that societal entities are ultimately reducible to the individual.¹ The last two decades have been characterised by new theoretical efforts towards the development of synthetic approaches that recognise the valuable points of previous theories and avoid embarking on those paths that have already proved to be fruitless (Giddens, 1987).

3.6.2 Collectivism and Individualism

An answer to the structure-agency dilemma came from the collectivist approach, which is based on the holistic ontological claim that there is a “Social Whole whose *sui generis* properties constituted the object of study” (Archer, 1995, p.5).

One of the earliest formulations of this standpoint is found in Comte and his positivist belief into the independent objective existence of social wholes, their irreducibility to individuals and the causal priority of the whole over its parts. These principles are constantly defended in the work of Durkheim whose faith in positivism influenced the belief that sociology should concern itself with the study of social facts. Looking at some of the main ideas in Durkheim’s work we can highlight the tenets of the collectivist approach. According to him:

“Whenever certain elements combine, and thereby produce, by the fact of their combination, new phenomena, it is plain that these new phenomena reside not in the original elements but in the totality formed by their union.” (Durkheim, 1962, p.xlvii)

¹The dispute has often been labelled with different names: holistic-compositive, holistic-atomistic, collectivistic-elementaristic. I refer to them by using the term ‘collectivism’ and ‘individualism’.

Consequently, man is seen as a product of society, shaped by social facts that “impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will” (Durkheim, 1962, p.2).

From a methodological point of view, considering ‘Society’ as a totality irreducible to individuals means that a ‘social fact’ can be explained only by referring to another ‘social fact’ and not referring to human individuals and their actions. Durkheim’s methodology for studying social facts relies on the methods of the natural sciences and rests on the idea that external social forces coerce people; therefore, they can be studied as objects by gathering definitions, observations, classifications, and statistical descriptions.

Within the collectivist frame, the researcher would attempt to define the subject of the study, for instance ‘the success of repatriation policies’, identify some possible factors responsible for it, as ‘incentive grants’ or ‘achieved stability in the country of origin’, and then identify indicators of success such as the number of immigrants that repatriated, their housing conditions, their access to employment, education, healthcare, etc. and then decide how to investigate empirically.

According to the opposite individualistic standpoint social reality is ontologically posited as the result of individuals and their actions. Sztompka explains that:

“The dominant themes of structural determinism and ‘social mould theory’ have been replaced by the themes of agential determinism and structural emergence” and “the lines of causation assumed to operate in the social realm have been reversed too: no longer from structures to action, but rather from action to structures.” (Sztompka, 1991, p.4)

This individualistic orientation can be clearly seen in Weber’s anti-positivist position. He conceives collectivities as “solely the resultants and modes of organisation of the specific acts of individual men, since these alone are [...] the agents who carry out subjectively understandable action” (Weber, 1968, vol I, p.13).

He concentrates on social behaviours and actions and emphasises the importance of human will, and the ability of people to change their behaviour. This position differs sharply from Durkheim’s focus on behaviour as being determined by social facts and,

of course, implies also a rejection of the collectivist methodological position on the grounds that people have a will which affects their behaviours and actions, and, therefore, they cannot be treated as objects and studied through the methodology of the natural sciences.

According to Weber the crucial components of 'action', i.e. the psychological context of action (intentions, motivations, reasons) and the normative (or cultural) context of action (rules, norms, values), cannot be researched through experiments, observation or other methods derived by natural sciences. It is necessary to apply new methods based on the interpretative understanding of human activities (Sztompka, 1979). For example, the researcher would seek for people's own perceptions and interpretation of their interaction with other actors in repatriation movements by interviewing returnees or observing the way they have organised their return or resettled in the host country.

Both these approaches have been criticised because they "either deny people their freedom because of their involvement in society or leave their freedom completely untrammelled by their social involvements" (Archer, 1995, p.4). If we bring these ideas closer to the subject of our study this criticism comes to life. Refugee movements are generally defined as 'forced migrations' and this immediately points to the structural deterministic pressures exercised on the individuals who are compelled to flee from their country. The application of a holistic approach to the issue would lead us towards the tempting vision of refugees as 'puppets' moved by structural forces with no agential power. The opposite approach, however, would deny the structural constraints we all seem to recognise as a limiting or enabling factor in our life and would postulate a situation where the structural elements leading to and connected to the experience of exile would be solely the result of individual activities. Neither a determinist nor a voluntaristic approach seems to help us in understanding the complex nature of the phenomenon under analysis. What does the contemporary debate offer us? In which other ways can we understand the relation between structure and agency?

3.6.3 Structuration Theory and Realist Social Theory

Sztompka affirms that “the dispute of collectivism and individualism is by no means outdated. It is still a significant controversy, providing a touchstone for the classification of contemporary sociological theories” (Sztompka, 1979, p.294). There are some modern approaches that assume a collectivistic standpoint, such as structural functionalism (Malinowski, Merton, Radcliffe-Brown), modern conflict theory (Dahl, Gluckman), modern systems theory (Buckley); others that depart from an individualistic approach, for instance, the early exchange theory (Homans) or symbolic interactionism (Blumer, Becker, Goffman). However, the contemporary debate in sociological theorising is dominated by synthetic efforts. Once the pendulum has already swung between two opposite bias, the absolutism of structures and the absolutism of actions, “sooner or later the need for a ‘third sociology’ was bound to be felt. Fusing the two instead of counterpoising them, combining the wisdom of both rather than ignoring half their message” (Sztompka, 1991).

The evolving theory of agency, in all its different formulations and developments, represents the main attempt to reconcile and link structures and actions and offers the possibility to investigate refugee issues by considering both the refugees’ agential power and the structural constraining or enabling factors affecting them.

Structuration theory and realist social theory are among the most well known examples of this kind of formulation. Although these theoretical developments stem from the same need of answering the ‘Structure-Agency’ question departing from the collectivist and individualist approaches, they offer two different solutions: the former proposes the concept of ‘duality of structure’ affirming the mutual constitution of structure and agency; the latter stresses the importance of emergent properties at the levels of both structure and agency and develops the concept of ‘analytical dualism’ according to which structure and agency are analytically distinct, irreducible to each other and temporally separable.

In order to understand the major contributions of both these approaches and the reasons for using a realist approach in the study of refugee issues I refer briefly to the work of

Giddens, the formulator and major exponent of structuration theory, and then focus on Archer's development of the realist concept of analytical dualism in her morphogenetic approach.

3.6.3.1 Giddens's Structuration Theory

Giddens' structuration theory affirms that the structure-agency dualism has to be reconceptualised as a duality: the duality of structure. This concept implies that structure and agency have to be seen as two sides of the same coin. On one side, structure "is something that is conceptualised as inhabiting people in the sense that it enters into the constitution of the reflexive and prereflexive motivations, knowledgeability and practices of people" (Stones, 2001, p.184). On the other side of the coin, "agency is the ability to act [...] in relation to the external and internal structure that provide the conditions of action" (Stones, 2001, p.184). Therefore, there are structural properties (defined as rules and resources) which lead a virtual existence until instantiated through agency structuration, in other words until activated by knowledgeable contemporary actors.

The conception of agency linked to action leads to the relevant claim that 'agent' is one who does something but who could have done otherwise "either positively in terms of attempted intervention in the process of 'events in the world', or negatively in terms of forbearance" (Giddens, 1979, p.56).

Going back to the pictorial description of the structure-agency debate as a pendulum swinging between the collectivists and the individualists' positions, structuration theory does not seem to have stabilised the pendulum as yet. In fact, the main critiques of structuration theory focus on the concept of 'duality of structure and agency' and its consequent rejection of the idea of independent structural forces exercising an external influence on human behaviour. Although Giddens recognises that society is not a creation of individuals, his conceptualisation of structure as 'rules and resources' existing only in memory traces and instantiated in action and his emphasis on the study of daily human activities seems to have led the pendulum towards the individualist side.

His work presents different limitations when approaching the issue of migration and

refugee issues, because of two particular points: the idea of ‘activity’ as a condition *sine qua non* of the existence of agency and the inseparability of structure and agency.

The question of the ‘over-active view of the agent’ that derives from Giddens’ ontology of praxis creates several problems when researching refugee issues, since I believe refugees have agential power to influence structures for the simple reason of existing and being an issue with which society has to confront with. For example, in 1999, during the refugee crisis in Kosovo, although most of the EU states promoted the reception of refugees in the region of origin as the best solution, the increasing number of refugees arriving in neighbouring countries, overburdening the camps and threatening the political stability of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Yugoslavia (FYROM)’s ethnic balance, forced the governments of many EU member states to accept the evacuation of Kosovar Albanians to their countries and to adhere to the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme.

The concept of ‘duality of structure’, with all its implications about both the nature of structure and agency creates some major analytical problems. As Archer (1995) and Layder (1987) explain, Giddens’ theory undermines any sense of structures as pre-constituted and relatively autonomous, or determinant of action. Healy argues that:

“[...]although we can readily concede the point that actors and structures are bound very closely together, when the time comes to do some research we will inevitably need to make the kind of distinctions that Giddens wants us not to make.” (Healy, 1998, p.512)

He also points to the fact that:

“Giddens will not allow a fixed and discursively available body of rules, a properly external system or a genuinely independent individual. The result is analytic paralysis: he ends up being unable to separate out these elements at all. [...] His theory allows little room for definite statements about cause and effect. Everything is left floating around in the vicinity of the actor, and the various elements are impossible to separate.” (Healy, 1998, p.510)

When analysing Koser (1993), Collins (1996) or Cuny and Stein (1991)'s work on repatriation earlier, I have argued for the importance of looking at repatriation (or settlement/resettlement) as the resulting outcome of a chain of events and I have, also, emphasised the notion that repatriation (or settlement) is the result of the interplay between structure and agency, making my task that of investigating this interplay over a period of time. This approach would enable me to investigate the complex relations between asylum policies, hosting society and refugees and analyse the ways in which they shape the context within which refugees have to decide about return. The fundamental principle of the duality posited by structuration theory prevents any attempt in this direction. The concept of structure and agency mutually constituting each other "precludes the examination of their interplay, of the effects of one upon the other and of any statement about their relative contribution to stability and change at any given time" (Archer, 1995, p.14) which is what I am interested in analysing. Archer's morphogenetic approach, discussed below, seems to offer a solution to the methodological issues concerning my research of refugees' decisions to settle or repatriate.

3.6.3.2 Archer's Morphogenesis

Archer's theory is grounded on the main principles of social realism such as the idea that structure and agency are analytically distinct and irreducible to each other, the methodological commitment to analytical dualism, the idea of a stratified social reality and the belief that structure and agency not only have distinctive properties and temporalities, but are also internally differentiated. In other words, her theory develops the idea that structure and agency are different levels of stratified social reality and have distinctive emergent properties which are real and causally efficacious but irreducible to one another (Archer, 1995). The consideration that structure and agency are not different aspects of the same thing but are completely different in kind is followed by the idea that "explanation of why things social are so and not otherwise depends upon an account of how the properties and powers of the 'people' causally intertwine with those of the 'parts'" (Archer, 1995, p.15). In short, structure and agency can be analytically

separated through temporality. Archer's morphogenetic/morphostatic approach² supplies a method for the analysis of their interplay over time and space and is based on two assumptions: structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) and structural elaboration necessarily post-dates it. She explains that: "because 'structure' and 'agency' are phased over different tracts of time, this enables us to formulate practical social theories in terms of the former being prior to the latter, having autonomy from it and exerting a causal influence upon it" (Archer, 1995, p.183). This allows Archer to develop the idea of morphogenetic/morphostatic cycles. Each cycle begins at stage one (T1) where we deal with structural conditioning which is antecedent to the social interaction which takes place at stage two (T2) and that might either generate structural elaboration or reproduction at stage three (T3). The same kind of cycle can be described for culture (cultural conditioning → cultural interaction → cultural elaboration) and agency (socio-cultural conditioning of groups → group interaction → group elaboration) and in society the three cycles operate continuously and are always interconnected through people. However, they are autonomous from one another and this means that we might encounter instances when the cycles are in synchrony in their promotion of either morphogenesis or morphostasis and others when they are out of synchrony when one is fostering morphogenesis while another is fostering morphostasis.

This approach supports the idea that we can analyse the interplay between 'structure' and 'agency' in refugee related issues and suggests a methodological path that would allow us to study analytically their histories of emergence.

3.6.4 Repatriation: Structuration or Morphogenesis?

Comparing Archer's theory with Giddens' structuration theory, it is clear that analytical dualism and the morphogenetic approach provide an interesting starting point for planning my work and approaching the research topic from a defined methodological

²The terms 'morphogenesis/morphostasis' used by Archer to define the temporal cycle 'conditioning → interaction → elaboration' derives from 'morpho' indicating shape and referring to the concept of society as an open system with no pre-set form and 'genetic' signalling that its shaping is the product of social relations. "Thus 'Morphogenesis' refers to those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, state or structure while 'Morphostasis' to those which tend to maintain them." (Archer, 1995, p.166).

perspective able to guide the selection of my methods of data collection and my final analysis of the research findings.

I am aware of certain issues raised by authors such as Stones (2001) who refuse the realism-structuration divide and try to dismiss the idea that duality in structuration theory means inseparability of structure and agency. He argues that structuration theory and realist social theory can actually be compatible at the ontological level and writes:

“I believe that there is a good deal of confusion here, deriving from the failure to carefully distinguish the lone signifier - whether this be ‘structure’, ‘dualism’ or ‘duality’ - from the conceptual network within which it derives its meaning.”

He explains that it is necessary:

“[...]to clarify the meaning of ‘structure’ in both Archer’s and Giddens’s work in order to show that both theorists’ conception of structure incorporates a sense of ‘dualism’ in Archer’s terms, which is based upon a temporal division between structural preconditions and the moment of agency. There is no necessary antagonism here.” (Stones, 2001, p.178)

However, my task is not that of engaging in such theoretical disputes and elaborating on these issues, but rather that of finding the best approach that can help me in studying my research topic, in simple words: the way refugees decide whether to settle in the host country or to repatriate. When it comes to doing research, Stones admits that “it is quite clear that Archer’s work, precisely on account of its placing so much emphasis on dualism, has much more to say about it than does structuration theory.” (Stones, 2001, p.184)

Walsham also explains that:

“There is not, and never will be, a best theory. Theory is our chronically, inadequate attempt to come to terms with the infinite complexity of the real

world. Our quest should be for improved theory, not best theory, and for theory that is relevant to the issues of our time.” (Walsham, 1993, p.478)

Archer’s development of the realist concept of analytical dualism through her morphogenetic/morphostatic framework offers the most developed tool for analysing the interplay between structure and agency in the study of refugee repatriation as I explain in more detail in the next chapter.

3.7 Conclusions

In this chapter I argued for the need of further research on issues related to refugee repatriation movements and reviewed some of the main theoretical approaches to the subject. Examining the developments in the field from the 1980s onwards, I emphasised the limitations of the predominantly empirical or descriptive existing material, underlining the lack of in-depth qualitative analysis and theoretical synthesis. In the attempt to develop a research approach that could enable me to avoid the pitfalls of merely descriptive empirical studies I examined the ways other authors have confronted this theme. I began by arguing that refugee repatriation should be considered as a particular case requiring a specific approach within the larger study of return migration. My argument was set in contrast with the ideas of Kunz Koser (1993) that refugees behave as any other kind of migrant when it comes to the decision to return. Given the general view that the set of experiences that cause a refugee to migrate and shape his/her life in the host country differ from those of other migrants, I argued that these differences also influence the way in which a refugee relates to repatriation. I then examined the work of Cuny and Stein (1991) that emphasises the advantage of studying repatriation as part of the whole experience of exile and connected these authors specific research on repatriation with other academic studies on refugee issues that developed along the same lines. Exploring the work of Kunz (1973) and Joly (2002), I established that there are major gains in contextualising refugees’ attitudes towards return and connecting it to the experiences that have preceded it in order to have a deeper understanding of its dynamics and its underpinnings. Through a review of the information and decision-

making models of Koser (1993) and Collins (1996), I exposed the shortcomings of a utilitarian approach to the study of refugees' decisions-making processes in relation to return. I examined the use of rational choice theory and highlighted the limitations of a gain/loss paradigm when studying a refugees' choice to settle or repatriate. Underlying the more complex set of factors influencing the decision to return I referred to beliefs, fears and emotional factors that go beyond a utility-maximizing behaviour. I concluded that these models propose a partial account of a complex phenomenon. Finally, Collins's study on voluntary/involuntary repatriation allowed me to highlight the theoretical limitations of such distinctions and clarify that the main issue behind this kind of debate is, obviously, the larger sociological question about 'freedom and constraint'. Overall, the way in which the existing theories have dealt with the link between social action and social context in refugee return issues is rather limited. In certain instances, such as Cuny and Stein's four categories of repatriation or Collins's typology of voluntary/involuntary repatriation, the authors have indirectly pointed towards the importance of analysing the issue while considering the structure-agency relation. However, they have not developed this obvious connection and their approaches keep repatriation far from the general debate between freedom and dependence, autonomy and constraint, structure and agency. I argued that in order to address these shortcomings we need to engage in a more sophisticated account of human beings relation to the world and develop a more adequate link between social action and social context when researching refugees and return. Among the main approaches to the theoretical debate on structure and agency, I propose Archer's morphogenetic approach as the most suitable for the study of refugees' interaction with repatriation policies. In the following chapter I explain her methodological approach in more detail outlining the main concepts and ideas that contributed to this study.

Chapter 4

Methodology and Research Process

4.1 Introduction

The literature review on return migration and refugee repatriation revealed the dearth of research in the field of refugee repatriation and highlighted a lack of appropriate theoretical foundations. Existing models are largely based on rational choice theory and are not sufficient to embrace the complexity of the phenomenon. In response, the previous chapter called for a different approach able to offer a more comprehensive examination of refugee repatriation and, especially, of refugees' decision-making processes in relation to return. Two main claims were made:

- Firstly, refugee repatriation should be analysed within the general debate about freedom and constraint, autonomy and dependence to help overcome the sterile division between 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' repatriation and better reflect the range of factors that influence the refugees' choice.
- Secondly, the topic should be placed within a more general theoretical framework that provides the opportunity to approach the issue from a well-defined ontological and epistemological position that can help the research planning while at the same time leaving space for further deductive theorising.

It was suggested that analytical dualism, as proposed in Archer’s morphogenetic model, can provide an interesting approach to the issue and enable the analysis of the interplay between structure and agency. It was argued that collectivism, individualism and structuration theory do not allow for such a kind of analysis because they support views that position refugees as either passive objects of given situations or full bearers of responsibility for their conditions.

This chapter analyses in more detail the ways in which these ideas relate to the study of exile and refugee repatriation and explains how they underpin the development of this research project. It is divided into two main parts, with the first exploring what Archer’s morphogenetic approach has to offer to the study of refugees’ decision to repatriate (or settle) and how it can help us to search for answers to the following questions: What do refugees think about the idea of repatriating? How do they choose whether to repatriate or settle? Which factors influence this choice? What are their current plans for the future? It does so by detailing the advantages of using the morphogenetic approach in this research and exploring three main ideas of Archer’s work: the morphogenetic/morphostatic cycle, the question of freedom and constraint, and the concept of agency. The second part discusses how this research process is informed by the theoretical underpinnings provided through Archer (1995) and deals with the more practical aspects of the research process providing more information about the selection of the case study, the research methods, ethical considerations, and the fieldwork experience.

4.2 Archer’s morphogenetic approach

Archer’s morphogenetic approach is an explanatory methodology developed on a realist social ontology and derives from a firm belief that social theory has to be useful and usable and should not be an end in itself. Through her methodology she aims to enable researchers to explore the interplay between structure and agency over a certain period of time, a feature which I believe is particularly helpful when exploring refugees’ attitudes towards return and the dynamics of their decision-making processes. In this respect, it is useful to explore here three key ideas of Archer’s work and relate them to the study

of refugee issues: the morphogenetic/morphostatic cycle coupled with the concept of double morphogenesis, the question of freedom and constraint and the stratified view of agency, with its particular distinction between primary and corporate agents. Each is viewed in turn below.

4.2.1 The morphogenetic/static cycle and the concept of double morphogenesis

As was explained in the previous chapter, Archer's morphogenetic approach supplies a method for the analysis of the interplay of structure and agency over time and space and is based on two theorems:

- “(i)Structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) which transform it and [...]
- (ii)Structural elaboration necessarily post-dates those actions.” (Archer, 1995, p.15)

Analytical separation on a temporal basis is the foundation of the development of a three-part cycle composed of: structural ‘conditioning’ at stage T1, where a given structure conditions, but does not determine, the social interaction taking place at stage T2. This social interaction takes place because of actions oriented towards the realisation of the interests and needs of current agents and results in either structural elaboration or reproduction at stage T3.

By means of an illustration of the morphogenetic/static cycle, I consider the case of refugees entering a country whose policies and/or public attitudes towards asylum and immigration are the emergent result of previous interactions between governments, refugees, NGOs and public opinion. The policies and public attitudes towards asylum, at stage T1, shape the situation new refugees find themselves into and the new socio-cultural and group interaction at stage T2. These can lead to the maintenance of those policies and attitudes towards asylum or to their elaboration at stage T3 that will define the new context at stage T1 of the following cycle.

Archer outlines four basic propositions which are necessary for the practical application of the morphogenetic/static analysis:

1. “there are internal and necessary relations within and between social structures;
2. causal influences are exerted by social structure(s) on social interaction;
3. there are causal relationships between groups and individuals at the level of social interaction;
4. social interaction elaborates upon the composition of social structure(s) by modifying current internal and necessary structural relationships and introducing new ones where morphogenesis is concerned. Alternatively, social interaction reproduces existing internal and necessary structural relations when morphostasis applies.”

(Archer, 1995, p.168–169)

Structure, culture and agency each undergo the same cycle of conditioning, interaction and elaboration (or reproduction) and the above four propositions apply to each of them.

The three cycles are respectively:

- (1) structural conditioning, (2) social interaction and (3) structural elaboration or reproduction.
- (1) cultural conditioning, (2) socio-cultural interaction and (3) cultural elaboration or reproduction.
- (1) socio-cultural conditioning of groups, (2) group interaction and (3) group elaboration or reproduction.

Although, structure, culture and agency are always involved where any form of Social Elaboration is concerned, Archer (1995) explains that the focus of an investigation can be even just on one element alone, provided that the others are still taken into account. In this thesis I focus on the dialectic relation between structure and agency and make

use of the concept of double-morphogenesis. This is the self-same process by which people bring about social transformation and which is at the same time responsible for the systematic transformation of agency. In other words, people collectively generate elaboration of structure and culture, while simultaneously undergoing elaboration as people. In the process of researching refugee repatriation it is essential to consider the double morphogenesis while taking into account the following issues. At the structural level the changes brought by the conflict to the country of origin and those undergone in the country of exile when managing, politically and socially, the experience of receiving and hosting refugees and at the level of agency the changes refugees go through during the whole experience as a group and as individuals. The concept of 'double-morphogenesis' enables us to connect those changes together by showing the way they are interrelated and causally influential to one another thus highlighting some of the indispensable dynamics that have to be considered when looking at the decision of whether to settle or repatriate.

4.2.2 Freedom and constraint

When examining the decision to repatriate (or to settle) I am especially interested in the way in which structural conditionings influence the decision-making process. Archer's theory suggests the following as a means to examine this aspect of the research problem:

"Structural and cultural factors influence agents only through shaping the situations in which they find themselves and distributing vested interests in maintenance and transformation to different groups. These compel no one and are better construed in terms of structure and culture supplying good reasons for various courses of action to those in given positions, than as hydraulic pressures. However, a good reason requires a reflective agent to evaluate it as such, to adopt it, and to decide then what to do about it, all of which is beyond the wits of 'passive man'." (Archer, 1995, p.249)

At this point it is necessary to clarify that some situations may be seen as unavoidably deterministic. For example, it is hard to see how the condition of exile does not exercise

a deterministic influence on refugees' lives. In fact, Archer herself uses the example of exile when accepting that constraining circumstances, like exile or famine, could be interpreted as hydraulic pressures since it is commonly assumed that no one would hold the project of starvation or exile. Naturally, she explains, this would be the case for the majority of us and simply indicates that human agents tend to have some basic common life projects. However, she goes on to claim that:

“To omit reference to them and to the self-reflexivity which is nevertheless involved in living them out (frequently in only semi-awareness) is to render two forms of action incomprehensible. They are robbed of intelligibility which is rooted in the reflective mediation of circumstances. On the one hand, there are reasons which can move people to entertain and sustain a project of starvation (hunger strikers), and on the other, the effect of experiencing a stringent constraint entails a considered response and not an autonomic reaction (there are many different ways of projecting the exilic experience).”
(Archer, 1995, p.199)

Guided by these considerations we are led to examine the ways in which different groups and individuals respond to the experience of exile, acknowledge the differences and capture some of the reasons behind them. The characteristic power of the people is their ‘intentionality’, their ability to make plans and projects¹ and think of ways to accomplish their goals in relation to whatever conditions they find themselves into. The approach can be summarised as one which attempts to determine how structural properties may hamper or aid projects.

Archer explains that:

“It is only their specific relationship to the particular projects of particular agents in particular positions which allows us to call their conditional influence a ‘constraint’ or an ‘enablement’. It makes no sense to think of

¹ With the term ‘project’ Archer refers to “any goal countenanced by a social agent, from the satisfaction of biologically grounded needs to the utopian reconstruction of society ” (Archer, 1995, p.198).

any emergent social property being constraining or enabling by nature or in abstraction. These themselves are also relational terms: they designate the congruence or incongruence between two sets of powers - those powers of the 'parts' in relation to the 'projects' of the people. Only in this way, of course, can the same environmental property [...] give rise to situations which some agents find enabling and others constraining." (Archer, 1995, p.198)

The case of repatriation programmes for temporarily protected refugees from Kosovo in different EU member states offers a good example. When temporary protection status for Kosovar refugees ended many governments offered three options: claim asylum, adhere to repatriation programmes set up by government and/or international organisations or face deportation. In this case repatriation programmes were an enabling factor for those refugees who had already decided that they wanted to return. The same programmes represented a constraint for those who wanted to remain in the host country and whose only alternatives were claiming asylum (with no guarantee of obtaining refugee status) or risk to be deported. Moreover, I argue that structural properties can also condition the formulation of a project itself by restricting or widening the imaginative space and influencing the practical sense of feasibility and viability. For example, refugees with a temporary permission to stay, either asylum seekers waiting for a decision or temporarily protected people, are faced with the uncertainty about their future imposed by their status. This situation of limbo makes it impossible for them to conceive a possible project for their future life in the country of exile and, at the same time, also makes it hard to plan for an eventual return that they usually fear.

So far I have stressed the importance of taking agency into account when analysing refugee issues, but I have used the term in a rather general sense. Archer has a particular view of agency that can contribute further to define the epistemological boundaries when researching refugees' agency in this context. The next section analyses her definitions of agency in relation to the specific case under analysis.

4.2.3 A stratified view of agency: Person, agents and actors

Archer proposes a stratified view of agency where she distinguishes three different levels: Human Persons (organisms with individual psychology and identity), Social Actors (persons occupying social positions and playing social roles); and Agents (members of collectivities sharing similar life chances). According to her this distinction is necessary since each of these levels entails different things in different settings and involves different powers, interests and reasons. Below is a brief summary of the main features of these three strata followed by a discussion of how this distinction can help in researching refugees' agency.

Person

Archer explains that the human person is the necessary central stratum to which Agents and Actors are anchored. The kinds of social beings that people become depend on the fact that human beings are the ones who do the becoming. This depends on people's specific properties which are indispensable for being able to recognise that a certain collective interest is one's own and that it influences one's present and future. The defining property of a human person is the continuity of consciousness, the ability to be aware of its own persistence and progress through time. This continuous 'sense of self' is the necessary contribution of our humanity to our social life and the indispensable conditions of social life itself.

Social Actor

Actors emerge from the 'triple morphogenesis' a process whereby specific social identities of individual social actors are created from agential collectivities in relation to the array of organisational roles available in a society at a specific moment in time (Archer, 1995).

Archer explains that:

“[...] Actors are not reducible to Persons but none the less have to be anchored in them in order to bring to any role they occupy the human qualities

of reflexivity and creativity. Without these qualities, the Actor is not a subject who can reflect upon the stringency of role-governed constraints and decide whether nothing else can be done other than routine acts of reproduction, nor one who can bring his or her personal ingenuity to bear in order to exploit the degrees of freedom and thus attempt role transformation.” (Archer, 1995, p.280)

She defines Actors as role incumbents and points out that roles themselves have emergent properties which cannot be reduced to the characteristics of their occupants. Social roles imply necessary and internal relations each of which entails other necessary and internal relationships with resources and rules. For example, a pupil requires a teacher, and this relation requires resources, such as buildings, teaching materials, specialised knowledge, and rules, such as curricula and attendance.

Agents

Agents are agents of the socio-cultural system into which they are born (groups or collectivities in the same position or situations) and of the systemic features they transform (since groups and collectivities are modified in the process). They are defined as collectivities sharing the same life chances and Archer explains that:

“Internal and necessary relations maintain between these two elements, for this concept is irreducible to ‘people plus some statistical probability about their future income, influence, etc.’ On the contrary, the major distributions of resources upon which ‘life chances’ pivot are themselves dependent upon relations between the propertied and the propertyless, the powerful and the powerless, the discriminators and the subjects of discrimination: and these, of course, are relationship between collectivities.” (Archer, 1995, p.257)

The notion of Agency as an emergent stratum implies that agency has powers proper to itself and it cannot be explained by any formula of the sort ‘individuals plus resources’. Agency is seen by Archer as the final product of the double morphogenesis in which

collectivities of human beings are grouped and re-grouped while they contribute to the process of changing or maintaining the structure or culture of society. At the same time, they retain or change their collective identities when maintaining or transforming the socio-cultural structures which they inherited at birth. She introduces also another important differentiation between corporate and primary agents. Corporate agents, such as self-conscious vested interest groups, promotive interest groups, social movements and defensive associations are characterised by their ability to articulate shared interests, organise collective action and have an active impact in structural and cultural modelling. They act together and interact with other Agents strategically, which means in a way that cannot be construed as the addition of individuals' self-interest. It follows that Corporate Agents are 'active' because they are social subjects with reasons for trying to bring about certain outcomes, rather than passive groups to whom things simply happen. Primary agents, instead, lack a say in systemic organisation and reorganisation, they do not express an interest or organise for their strategic pursuit. Their impact on the system comes only in the form of unintended aggregate effects of the reaction of collectivities similarly situated in the context they live in. However, despite the fact that they behave as people to whom things happen, who respond to happenings which are not of their making and whose agential effects can be analysed simply as aggregate responses, they cannot be considered as intrinsically 'passive'. Their passivity itself, according to Archer, represents a deliberate suspension of their agential powers on the part of those corporate agents whose interest it serves. Therefore, their passiveness can often be understood only in terms of the relations between Collectivities, a relation that takes the following form:

"Corporate Agency [thus] shapes the context for all actors (usually not in the way any particular agent wants but as the emergent consequence of Corporate interaction). Primary Agency inhabits this context, but in responding to it also reconstitutes the environment which Corporate Agency seek to control. The former unleashes a stream of aggregate environmental pressures and problems which affect the attainment of the latter's promotive interests. Corporate Agency thus has two tasks, the pursuit of its self-declared goals,

as defined in a prior social context, and their continued pursuit in an environment modified by the responses of Primary Agency to the context which they confront.” (Archer, 1995, p.260)

The outcome of the interaction can either lead to morphogenesis or morphostasis both at the systemic level and at the level of Agency itself. This is the process of double morphogenesis during which Agency, in its attempt to maintain or change the social system, cannot avoid maintaining or changing the categories of Corporate and Primary Agents themselves. In fact, it is necessary to stress that the distinction between Corporate and Primary agents is not a static one, since Primary agents can constitute themselves into new social movements and eventually become Corporate agents themselves.

In a few words Archer’s stratified view of agency presents the human Person as fathering the Agent who fathers the Actor and proposes a differentiation between Primary agents and Corporate agents as having different properties and powers. In the context of refugee studies these distinctions are useful because they enable researchers to acknowledge the individual character of refugees at their level of human Persons while focusing on their position within the social context both as Social Agents, that is as collectivities sharing the same life chances, and Social Actors², as occupying certain roles shaped by Social Agency. This means that it is not for a study of this kind to analyse refugees’ individual personal psychology and identity as this would require a different disciplinary approach, but what can be explored from a sociological perspective here are their social positions as well as their membership of collectivities sharing similar life chances. The most interesting concept in Archer’s view of agency in this respect is the distinction between Corporate and Primary agents. Often, asylum seekers, and in some cases even refugees with convention status, behave as Primary agents, mostly reacting to what happens to them with a complete lack of collective organisation and without an articulated shared interest. Many obstacles lie on the path towards becoming corporate agents, for example there are obvious problems of communication given by the fact that they arrive at different stages, come from different cultural systems, speak different languages, are located in different areas in the country of exile, etc.

²Social Agent and the Social Actor are not different people – the distinction is only temporal and analytical.

While such an observation has often led researchers to consider refugees as passive beings with no saying in the structural and cultural system surrounding them Archer, in contrast, outlines a more sophisticated understanding. Talking about primary agents as passive agents does not mean, in Archer's term, considering them as powerless, or unable to have any effect on society. The consideration of their agential power as the result of aggregate responses leaves more space for the study of their impact over society.

4.3 From theory to practice: the morphogenetic approach and empirical research

Archer's analytical dualism, the idea of morphogenetic/static cycles, the conceptualisation of freedom and constraint and the stratified view of agency form the basis of my methodology and shape the selection of research methods I chose to apply to this research. Walsham states that "A good framework should not be regarded as a rigid structure, but as a valuable guide to empirical research" (Walsham, 1993, p.71). In fact, Archer conceived her morphogenetic approach as the practical complement of social realism supplying "a genuine method of conceptualising how the interplay between structure and agency can actually be analysed over time and space" (Archer, 1995, p.15). However, her explanatory methodology does not indicate a preference for specific research methods, but rather guides the approach to the subject under investigation and their selection. The attempt to apply analytical dualism and the morphogenetic approach to this kind of empirical study does not have many precedents, making this task more difficult and more challenging at the same time. In response, the research design called for methods that could enable me to analytically separate the subject on a temporal basis following the three main steps indicated by Archer's morphogenetic/morphostatic model.

In order to study the factors influencing refugees' attitudes towards return two key cycles needed to be considered. Firstly, it is necessary to analyse the refugees' interaction with the conflict in the country of origin in order to understand the reasons for their flight and the relationship they had with the conflict while in exile. Secondly, a study of the cycle

that begun with the arrival of the refugees in the country of exile in order to examine their interaction with its structures and how these affected the decision about return.

This required a multidisciplinary approach able to combine a study of the political and legal aspects of the issue with the main sociological ones by using, mainly, a qualitative research method. The use of secondary analysis, documentary analysis and interviews with policy makers, representatives of international organisations, NGOs and community leaders also helped in identifying and explaining a range of structural and cultural factors so as to enable me to subsequently explore the interplay between those and agency. On the other hand, interviews with refugees were indispensable for learning about their understanding of their relationship with the country of origin, the conflict, the host society and, especially, their projects for the future (to settle or to repatriate?). Each form of data collected represented a piece of the temporal jigsaw outlined by the morphogenetic model. Therefore, as a methodological framework, the model guided both the collection of empirical data and the focus of the analysis.

Having explained the basis of my approach to the study of refugee repatriation and the methodological assumptions that underpin the development of my research strategy, in the next sections I explain the more practical aspects of this research project focusing on three stages: the selection of the case studies, the research methods and the actual experience in the field.

4.3.1 Case study

The choice of studying Kosovo-Albanian refugees in Italy and in the UK was dictated by the consideration that in the case of Kosovo several repatriation programs set up by European governments seem to have been ‘successful’ in reference to the number of people participating. This apparent success has supported the claims of many politicians that repatriation is what the refugees themselves wish for and has provided them with a good example against the idea of granting long-term status. However, despite the success of repatriation rates in the Kosovo case, the fact that not all Kosovars have repatriated and others are still coming to seek asylum offered an interesting chance to question the idea that all refugees want to repatriate. It was considered that the analysis of this case

could have better answered questions such as: Why some refugees decide to repatriate and others decide not to? How much control do the refugees have over their decision-making process? And, especially, are the ones who are still in exile planning to settle or to return? Which are the factors that influence their decision? The choice of comparing Italy and the UK, two host countries within the European context, is an attempt to understand the impact of different asylum policies and socio-economic situations on the decision to repatriate. A comparative analysis offers the possibility to highlight the impact of different structural and cultural contexts on refugees who escaped from the same conflict and share a similar pre-exile experience. These two countries represent two different European realities due to their geopolitical position, their history of migration, their different relationships with the European Union, their legal developments on the issue of asylum and their approach to the conflict in Kosovo.

The initial design of the research project also included fieldwork in Kosovo, so as to enable me to assess the situation on the ground after the end of the war and conduct some interviews with returnees. I had been offered an internship by the IOM within the Employment Assistance Services unit assisting former KLA combatants, war widows, and Kosovo Protection Corps Reservists to find employment. However, in consideration of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's assessment of the situation in Kosovo as highly dangerous and the general recommendations to avoid travelling to Kosovo unless necessary, concerns about my safety were raised by the funding bodies and the university. As a matter of fact, both the job assigned to me by the IOM and the fieldwork for my research project would have required a lot of travelling around Kosovo which made my stay all the more dangerous. The IOM could only offer me protection for the tasks related to the work carried out for them, but not for the movements required for my own research. Consequently, given the level of risks involved funding was not secured and I had to devise a different way of gathering information. In order to examine Kosovo's post-war situation I have referred to documents and reports of the main organisations operating on the ground and secondary sources. The ability to interview returnees would have clearly added a further dimension to my research on refugees' decision-making process vis-à-vis return, since it would have provided me with the opportunity to ask the returnees about the reasons for their return and their experience with the

post-war conditions in Kosovo. Nevertheless, the focus on the refugees who were still in Italy and the UK has allowed me to satisfactorily investigate refugees' attitudes towards return and explore the decision-making process.

4.3.2 Ethical questions

The research presented a number of ethical considerations due to the very sensitive nature of the topic in general and to the prominent focus on the conflict in Kosovo and on the refugees' relation to it. This affected many of the phases of the research process from the collection and analysis of secondary data to the interviews with the refugees.

The Balkans have witnessed centuries of wars, political, religious and ethnic tensions and consequently historical accounts are often criticised for not being objective and for proposing partial versions of facts and revisionist interpretations of events. It is even more so the case with recent publications that evaluate the conflict of the 1990s, whose wounds still run deep. Morozzo della Rocca (1999) explains that there is a vast literature on Kosovo that is influenced by the Serbian and the Albanian interpretative thesis. As he puts it, there are always two truths when it comes to Kosovo: "Sul Kosovo esistono sempre due verità" (Morozzo della Rocca, 1999, p.8). Therefore, choosing the right points of reference for analytical purposes was a difficult task. I followed Morozzo della Rocca's approach of referring mainly to those facts accepted by both groups and I limited my work to a collection of important basic facts avoiding judgements and evaluations of responsibilities and faults. When it was necessary to refer to partial accounts or interpretations in order to explain what a certain group believes or wants other people to believe and how this influenced other views or events I openly stated that this was the case.

Another sensitive issue encountered from an early stage was that of language. For example, it was highly recommended to use a non-Serbian pronunciation of geographical names during the interviews.

The nature of the topic discussed during the interviews required a clear explanation of the aim of the research and my position as a researcher. Of course, it was necessary

to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality to all the interviewees ³. The names of the refugees quoted in the thesis have been changed to protect their identity. Furthermore, two cases required even more attention. One case is that of some interviewees who admitted to have been part of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) or had relatives involved, or implied that this was the case; the other case regards the interviews conducted in Comiso, the Italian municipality where a former NATO base was used to host around 5000 refugees coming through the evacuation programme in 1999. At the time of my fieldwork the magistrates were investigating the way government funds had been misspent and the way the camp had been run. People in the administration and those who had worked or volunteered during the crisis were very reluctant to talk to me and those who did agree to be interviewed needed to have their identity protected.

Despite the fact that, generally, refugees showed enthusiasm for the fact that someone was interested in their stories and was writing about it, the interviews required special attention when discussing certain issues that caused tension and distress such as the time of repression and persecution. In order to reduce stress to the minimum, I devoted plenty of time for each interview giving people the possibility to take their time. I never insisted or pushed people to answer questions they were feeling uncomfortable with. Questions about the reasons for the flight or the situation during the conflict recalled, inevitably, the moments families and friends had been killed or tortured, the images of their village or their house burning, the times people were hiding in the mountains. It was often required to interrupt the interviews and change subject until necessary. This occasion tested also my emotional position as a researcher as I explain in a later session on my experience in the field.

I asked for permission to record the interviews to my interviewees and, in most cases, I was asked not to use a tape recorder. I accepted this condition since I felt that it was ethically correct to respect the wishes of the interviewees and I also realised that by not insisting and showing respect and understanding for their reasons I put myself in a better position to be trusted. Nevertheless, this posed a technical problem and a further ethical concern. The interviews were long, in-depth discussions and I needed to

³Copies of the letter of information and the informed consent letter are in Appendix C and D.

record the outcome as accurately as possible so as not to lose any important data and, also, make sure that the views of the interviewees were respected and reported correctly. As such, it was necessary for me to devise a different technique that is described in the following section.

4.3.3 Interviews

An investigation of the methods used in previous research on topics related to refugees' experience reveals a preference for an open approach to the subjects using unstructured or semi-structured interviews. I identified the method of semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate tool to gain knowledge about the refugees' experience. This method leaves a certain freedom to the respondents while retaining a good capacity for later analysis and requires the use of questions in a flexible manner as a guide to conversation (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). Therefore, it does not exclude the possibility that interviewees may produce a wealth of non requested information leading the discussion to unexpected directions (Rubin and Rubin, 1995) and enabling the researcher to explore new areas of potential interest (Fielding, 1993).

It was necessary to design interview guidelines that reflected the ideas developed in the theoretical work on repatriation and on the selected methodological approach to the issue. As a result, the questions were clustered under different sections concerned with life before the flight, arrival and settlement in the country of exile, and plans for the future after the end of the conflict. These reflect the three phases of Archer's morphogenetic/static cycle with structural conditioning at stage T1, social interaction at stage T2 and structural elaboration or reproduction at stage T3. In practical terms this meant that after a few questions about their current status and some personal data, I asked them about life before and during the conflict, and the flight. Subsequently, I focused on the arrival in the host country and the impact with life in exile, asking questions about accommodation, legal advice, health, employment, language, education, social life, racism-discrimination, attitudes towards the conflict, information about Kosovo. Finally, I enquired about their plans for the future and attitudes towards repatriation. I had a list of questions for each session, but very often there was no need for me to ask

each of them, since the discussion on the general topic provided me with the answers already. The interview guidelines are enclosed as an appendix (Appendix 1).

The structure of the interview, with questions chronologically clustered under different headings, guided my analysis of the findings and represented an initial distinction of various issues I wanted to compare and analyse. Firstly, the transcripts and notes of the interviews were manually analysed with the use of colours. Secondly, the data were related to the findings obtained through other primary sources and secondary data. For example, the answers to the questions on life before the conflict and the reasons for the flight were compared and analysed within the context of Chapter 5, which deals with the escalation of the conflict in Kosovo.

As I have explained, during the early stage of the fieldwork it became apparent that people did not want me to tape the interviews and I needed to devise a system that would enable me to record the data effectively in order to retain all the information and remain as close as possible to the actual content of the conversations. Of course, I tried to take as many notes as possible during the interviews, but this was not enough and it was not always possible at all moments since it was important to maintain eye contact with the refugees especially when they were discussing very sensitive issues. Therefore, after the first two interviews I started using the following method: I took a tape recorder with me and during the interview I noted as much information as possible by using key words that could help me remember the conversation. As soon as the interview was over and I parted company with the interviewee I used the tape recorder and, with the help of my notes, I repeated the discussion and recorded it. In order to verify the usefulness and accuracy of this method I did this even in those cases where people had agreed on taping the interview and I compared the final transcripts. The accuracy was very satisfactory and, therefore, I kept using this technique every time it was necessary.

4.3.4 “Acquiring a Sample”

The individuals interviewed for this study are not a representative sample of the Kosovar Albanian population in the UK or Italy. An attempt to build a representative sample would have been, in any case, difficult since there are no official data accounting for

the total number of people coming from Kosovo in both countries. This is because throughout the 1990s they were registered as people coming from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and no mention was made to the specific area they came from. The records available are incomplete since they regard mostly refugees who came as part of the evacuation programme set up by the international community during NATO's intervention in 1999 and often ignore the spontaneous arrivals. Therefore, given the indeterminate nature of the population, the notion of "sampling" in its exact statistical sense does not apply in this case. Overall, this research is a qualitative study involving small numbers. The interviewees were selected using a combination of snowballing and quota sampling techniques based on my contacts with associations and individuals in the field. However, I have included in the "sample" people belonging to different age groups, from both sexes and with different legal status in the host country.

The age range was generally broad, although largely concentrated in the twenty to forty range. The interviewees extended from college students to individuals in their fifties and sixties, and in four cases over seventies.

They came from various parts of Kosovo, and both from rural and urban areas. Overall, the majority of those who came in the UK and Italy during the first half of the 1990s came from urban areas, mainly Pristina/Prishtin, Pea/Pec and Mitrovica/Mitrovice. The majority of those who came in the late 1990s came from rural areas. I do not specify the exact locations as this might indirectly reveal the identity of the respondents. In Italy, around 25% of the respondents arrived between 1990 and 1993, another 25% between 1994 and 1995, 25% between 1996 and 1998, and the final 25% in 1999. In the UK 29% of the interviewees arrived between 1990 and 1993, 11% came between 1994 and 1995, another 22% between 1996 and 1998 and the final 38% in 1999.

Out of a total of fifty-five interviews with refugees, thirty were conducted in Italy and twenty-five in the UK. I conducted twenty-six interviews with men, twenty with women and nine with families. This means that nine were group interviews with the whole family present at the same time, varying from two to ten family members. As a result, a total of about ninety people were involved in these fifty-five semi-structured interviews. An overview of the figures is given in Table 4.1

REFUGEES	ITALY	UK	Total
Males	15	11	26
Females	11	9	20
Families	4	5	9
TOTAL	30	25	55

TABLE 4.1: Breakdown of interviewee numbers

I tried to cover various geographical areas in Italy and in the UK in order to collect data from people who experienced life in different parts of the host countries, from the capital, to other big cities, to small towns and villages. For example, in the UK I talked to people in London, the Midlands, North and South of England and Wales, while in Italy I went to different regions: Veneto, Lombardia, Toscana, Lazio and Puglia. I do not specify the exact locations as this might indirectly reveal the identity of the respondents.

4.3.5 Access

In order to gain access I established contacts with key informants in both countries. These were representatives of Kosovar Albanian and Albanian organisations such as Kosova Phoenix and Albanesi in Toscana, NGOs working with immigrants and refugees such as Refugee Action and IOM, and local authorities. In order to widen the “sample”, I also used personal networks in both countries talking to British or Italian citizens who introduced me to Kosovar Albanians who lived or worked in their areas. These key informants introduced me to a few refugees who, in turn, offered to put me in touch with other Kosovar Albanians.

It was more difficult to gain access in the UK where four of the people contacted refused to talk to me because during the war in 1999 they had been contacted by various journalists and talking to them had been very traumatic. They also explained that the way their positions had been reported in the press had been very disappointing. In Italy, only two people refused to talk to me because they still felt unable to discuss the persecution and the horror of the war in Kosovo.

Talking to women and families was a central part of my research plan. In order to understand how different personal conditions and situations affect the refugees’ decision-

making process it was necessary to talk to people from both sexes and also with different family situations. I did not encounter any problems with gaining access to women and families. Overall, once people agreed to talk to me they seemed to be open and during the conversation they showed an increasing level of trust in me. This is mostly due to the fact that at the beginning of each interview I let them ask questions about me and my work to make sure that they understood the nature and the aim of the research. Knowing something about me created an immediate connection as I explain later in the chapter.

4.3.6 Language

The majority of the interviews were carried out either in English or in Italian, while a few respondents required the help of an interpreter from Albanian into English or Italian. I asked about the language problem during my first contact in order to have the necessary time to organise for an interpreter to translate. Having one interpreter in each country was not an option for me, since as a student I did not have funding to pay an interpreter to come with me at each interview. It was also difficult to rely on a volunteer because I was travelling long distances within the UK and Italy. For practical reasons I had to look for somebody who could translate for me when this was necessary and in the area I was having the interview.

Using an interpreter adds the presence of a third person to what should be typically a one-to-one interview relationship and creates some problems. Edwards (1998) discusses some of the issues involved in the use of interpreters in the field and explains two different approaches. One response is acting as “if this was not the case; to render the interpreter invisible” (Edwards, 1998). This position requires the use of methods (triangular seating arrangement, direct translation using the first person, etc.) able to push the interpreter in the background. In this case, interpreters are expected to match the interviewees’ social characteristics and the researcher by understanding their role and responsibility within the research process. The other approach, supported by Edwards, is based on the idea of making the interpreters visible by acknowledging their presence and use this as a strength. This approach requires “an exploration of the social location of the interpreter

and, along with the researcher and interviewee, their impact upon the construction of the interview accounts” (Edwards, 1998).

In my case, the interviewees who needed an interpreter had a certain knowledge of Italian or English language, but they did not feel confident and comfortable enough to use a foreign language to answer my questions. They were able though to understand if the translation was not correct and in those cases they either said it in English or Italian themselves, or stopped and asked to clarify. I left the interviewees choose a person they trusted to translate for me, usually a friend or a relative. Following Edwards’ example, I considered the interpreters as a further source of information taking into account a reflexive evaluation of their social position, their beliefs and their relationship with the interviewee and the way they interacted with me and the respondent during the interview. Only in one case in Italy the interviewee did not speak Italian at all, this was the case of a ninety year old woman whose nephew translated for her. I considered the discussion with this woman as part of a group-interview with her family of four individuals.

In Italy many of the people I interviewed speak Italian with the strong local accent of the area they live in. In some cases they actually use many words from the local dialects when talking Italian. A personal familiarity with many Italian dialects helped me in understanding them and interpreting some of the words they were using. For example, when conducting my interviews in Veneto many people referred to their employers as ‘padrone’ (master), a direct translation of ‘paron’ used in the dialect of that region. In this case this was not indicative of the relationship of the interviewees with their employers, but rather reflected the way in which certain local strata of the population still refer to their employers as “master” when using the dialect.

4.3.7 Direct and Participant Observation

There are different forms of observation from participation requiring the researcher to get involved in the context he/she is researching to observation where the researcher remains an outsider while observing. Both methods of direct and participant observation were a useful tool to further my understanding of the refugees’ social organisation and of their

dynamic interaction with the host society and its structure.

Direct observation implies that the researcher remains external to the group and watches rather than take part. For example, in Italy, I attended three meetings of local Albanian associations and one national meeting of Albanians and Kosovar Albanians coming from different Italian regions. The latter was an important event where the main issues concerning the Albanian community in Italy were discussed. In this occasion I was provided by the organisers with a professional interpreter who translated simultaneously for me. I was also invited to observe the latest stage of the organisation of the 'Settimana della Cultura Albanese', a conference on Albanian Culture whose main purpose was that of improving the image of Albanian and Albanians in Italy.

Further occasions to gather data through observation were those interviews that took place in the refugees' accommodation. This was mostly the case in Italy. In fact, while most interviews in the UK were carried out in public places, in Italy the majority of them took place at the house of the respondents giving me the opportunity to observe more houses. When visiting people at home for the interview I observed the place and took several notes on what I saw. For example it was common to find the television on and in several cases the respondents turned the volume down and left it on during the interview. They were watching RTK (Radio Television Kosovo), the first independent public broadcaster in Kosovo set up and managed by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). The channel started transmitting two hours per day in September 1999 and in January 2002 (the time when I started the fieldwork in Italy) it started transmitting fifteen hours per day. Other common features of the houses I visited were a display of different images such as pictures of Mother Theresa, whose family was Albanian, the Albanian flag and pictures of KLA soldiers who lost their life in combat.

Participant observation requires the researcher to become a participant in the context that is being observed. There are different roles the researcher can adopt in participant observation that can be carried out covertly, by attempting to pass as a member of the group, or overtly, by explaining that the purpose of the observation is that of collecting data for the research. In my case my position as a researcher was always clear. I was invited, both in Italy and in the UK to cultural events, to dinners where traditional

food was served and to the celebration of the day of the Albanian National Flag and of Muslim festivities ('Id al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice and Mawlid al-Nabiy the birthday of the prophet Muhammad).

A few times after having lunch or dinner at a particular family we would regroup around the television and watch RTK. Of course I could not understand what was said in Albanian and they explained to me what was going on. These moments often started discussions on Kosovo, its past and present situation and its future. During three instances when this happened the TV station broadcasted programmes that showed traditional folklore or the daily live coverage of The Hague trial.

4.3.8 Other interviews

During the fieldwork I also interviewed leaders of Kosovar Albanian associations, representatives of international and national organisations and NGOs, and policy makers. In Italy I interviewed representatives of the UNHCR, IOM, CIR, PNA, Caritas, ANCI, Agesci, Caritas di Ragusa, three officials of Comiso City Council, two officials of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. I also interviewed representatives of Albanian associations in Tuscany, Veneto, Lombardi and Lazio. In the UK, I talked to representatives of Refugee Action, Refugee Council, ECRE, IOM, UNHCR, ODA. At the time of the fieldwork in the UK, many of the Albanian associations that were active during the war had ceased to operate, as for example Kosova Phoenix. Nevertheless, I managed to talk to some of the people who had been involved.

Before each meeting with representatives of NGOs and policy makers, I studied the specific context within which their organisations or institutions work and the role they play in the field. The Internet proved to be a very useful tool in this phase allowing me to access updated information about the organisations and enabling me to customize the questions of my interviews for the specific meeting with the representative of each agency. In Italy, most of this work was carried out in Rome and partly in Milan, in the UK mainly in London, the cities where most organisations at national and international level have their headquarters.

I visited some of the organisations several times, either to talk with people working in different offices or to consult the archives. Access was relatively easy, though it usually required protracted mail and phone negotiations before each first meeting. The most difficult task was that of obtaining an appointment with officials working for the Ministry of Interior in Italy, I had to use all my personal contacts and connections to be able to meet the high officials in charge.

4.3.9 Documentary evidence

Many documentary sources were examined as part of the research. Use was made of reports of the UNHCR, OSCE, UNMIK, ECRE, IOM, CIR, Refugee Action, Refugee Council, MORI, Oxfam, Caritas, ICG, ISTAT, SISTAN, ICS, etc. Some reports were written but not published and were obtained directly from the organisations. For example, in the UK I was given copies of correspondence between the Home Office and Refugee Action concerning various issues related to the end of temporary protection.

Information on the history of Kosovo and the causes of the war that took place in 1999 was obtained from published books and articles by academics and other experts. The main documents and reports consulted on the war and its aftermath were those produced by the UN, UNMIK, OSCE, the UNHCR, ICG, EU. Important sources of reference were the 'Kosovo Report', produced by the Independent International Commission on Kosovo, and 'Strategy for Sustainable Returns' and 'The Right to Sustainable Return', produced by UNMIK.

Newspapers and web-based news were consulted in both countries in order to find information about the wider debate on asylum in the UK and Italy, and the Kosovar refugee crisis. In the thesis I refer specifically to articles published on The Guardian, BBC News, La Repubblica, Il Giornale di Sicilia, La Sicilia.

I also used other internet resources to obtain information concerning the peace agreement, the situation in the country after the war and consult reports monitoring the social, political and economic developments in Kosovo. Particularly useful was information published by UNMIK and OSCE on the election results and IOM statistics on

return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Statistics on the number of persons that arrived in Britain as part of the programme were obtained from the Home Office statistical bulletins and in Italy from the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

4.3.10 My position in the field

The people I interviewed showed great respect for the fact that I was a student. Education is very important to Kosovar Albanians because access to education has been an integral part of the ethnic conflict in Kosovo and many of them had this right denied.

Once the interviewees heard that I was from Italy and that I was living in England a form of direct connection to me was immediately established. In the UK I was perceived as another person who came from the south of Europe into a country that was very different from 'home'. They often referred to the local population as 'they', a third group different from them and from me. Moreover, it was given for granted that I could be able to share the same feeling of nostalgia for friends and family back home. Although my experience in Italy was obviously different from theirs in Kosovo and despite the fact that the two places are culturally quite different, it was assumed that 'they and I' came from the 'same culture' and therefore went through the same 'cultural shocks' in the UK. Comments like "I guess you can understand what I mean!" were often made.

Paradoxically, in Italy I went through a similar situation. For the interviewees the fact that I am Italian but I am living abroad put me in a better position to understand their problems since 'I must know' what it means to live abroad, to cope with a different system and culture and 'I must miss' my country, my family and friends, the food, the weather, etc. Sentences such as: "You know what it feels like", "You must have a hard time away from your family too", "You feel neither here nor there, don't you feel the same way?" were recurrent.

In most cases, they wanted to know from where I was exactly in Italy and, once again, saying that I was from Sicily created an even closer connection. Many of them had an image of Sicily as a 'poor corrupt' region of southern Italy and they started to mention

certain problems in Kosovo referring to Sicily. Some of them had heard from relatives and friends who had migrated to Germany or Switzerland in the 1960s and 1970s about Sicilian immigrants. 'Their people and my people' had been through similar problems.

When discussing with people in the North of Italy about the relationship with the local population and when asking questions about discrimination and racism, they immediately referred to the racism against southern Italians as a parallel to their condition. The underlying assumption was again that through these examples I should have understood even better. On the one hand, this situation created more trust and people felt they could talk openly about certain issues. They felt that those elements of my personal life were a sort of guarantee of my understanding, sympathy and reliability. On the other hand, certain questions I was asked made me fear that my answers could influence theirs, especially when getting to the final discussion about their future and their plans. In most cases, especially when interviewing women, I was asked to answer the same questions I was asking them, they wanted to know where do I feel more at home? What am I planning to do? Will I stay in the UK or return to Italy?

I feared that my answers to these questions might influence theirs and at the same time I did not want to disappoint them by showing to be very reserved and not to trust them. My solution was that of leading the conversation back to their opinions and ideas and talk a little about myself once I had obtained their answers. I tried to focus more on aspects of my life that were unrelated to the main subjects of the interviews. This was not easy, since I was personally asking those exact questions about the future to myself at that time.

The fieldwork was emotionally rewarding and demanding at the same time. I felt that those who accepted to talk to me considered my research to be important since it was a way to have their voice heard. I am still in contact with many of the people I interviewed. This has been useful for my research and my data, since during the analysis of the interviews I have been able to go back to them asking for some clarifications. Moreover, they have given me the necessary encouragement to work on the project during different stages of the research process. Listening to the refugees' accounts of life in a conflict zone, of massacres, of torture, hearing about their problems in the host countries and their

fears about the future required me to be understanding while refraining from showing the deep disturbing effect those accounts were having on me. If they had found the strength to go through those times and tell me the story, I had to at least find the strength to listen.

4.4 Conclusions

Having established the need for solid theoretical and methodological foundations that could guide the development of a research design able to capture the various relations between the different actors involved in refugee repatriation, I argued in this chapter for the advantage of using Archer's methodological approach.

The first part of the chapter explored some specific ideas of her work and explained their relevance when analysing refugee-related issues, especially with regard to return. Firstly, it was argued that analytical dualism, through its formulation in the morphogenetic approach, provides a useful tool for the analysis of the complex relations between refugees, the conflict in the country of origin and the situation in the country of exile. Moreover, the concept of double morphogenesis emphasises the importance of paying attention to the way in which refugees undergo changes themselves while interacting with the country of exile and altering or reproducing some of its structures. Secondly, Archer's theory supports the consideration of asylum policies and, specifically, repatriation policies, either as forms of enablement or as constraints to refugees' projects depending on different perspectives. This facilitates their placement within a theoretical framework that also views refugees as social actors able to react and adapt their projects to different conditions and recognise their agency. In fact, Archer's stratified view of agency with its three levels of Human Person, Agent and Actor, enables researchers to acknowledge the individual character of refugees at their level of Human Persons while focusing on their position within a given social context both as Social Agents and Social Actors. Furthermore, the distinction between Primary agents and Corporate agents with their different properties and powers suggests the need to consider the impact of refugees' agency both in those cases when they form proactive organised groups or in those situations when

they react as an unorganised group to a given situation.

The second part of the chapter explained the ways in which these methodological underpinnings have guided the more practical development of this research and provides an account of the research methods adopted and the experience in the field. The study used a multidisciplinary approach in the attempt to explore the political and legal aspects of refugee repatriation as well as the main sociological ones. The use of secondary analysis, documentary analysis and interviews with policy makers, representatives of international organisations, NGOs and community leaders provided the necessary data to understand many structural and cultural factors and explore the interplay between these and refugees. At the same time, interviews with refugees provided a better understanding of their relationship with the country of origin, the conflict, the host society and, especially, their future plans.

In the terms set out by the morphogenetic models these data were essential for analysing two main cycles involved in refugee repatriation issues. Firstly, the cycle that began with the flight of the refugees examining their interaction with the country of origin during exile; secondly, a study of the cycle that began with the arrival of the refugees in the country of exile examining their interaction with its structures. The study of these two parallel cycles allows me to analyse the ways in which the interplay between refugees and the country of origin and that of exile influence their choice on return.

PAGE NUMBERING AS IN THE ORIGINAL THESIS

Chapter 5

The Conflict and the Reasons for the Flight

5.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to explore Kosovar Albanians' relationship with the conflict and their reasons for the flight. As I have argued in Chapter 3, this is an important step towards understanding their position in relation to the conflict, the impact this had on their lives, the reasons for leaving the country of origin, and the time and modality of the flight. These factors do not only affect their mode of settlement, as argued by scholars such as Kunz (1973) and Joly (2002), but also have a significant impact on their decision about return as suggested by Cuny and Stein (1991).

Firstly, this chapter provides the necessary background to analyse the impact the relationship between the refugees and their country of origin has had on their settlement and their views about return. It begins with a brief account of the historical background of the conflict and then focuses on the situation of the 1990s, specifically, the 1999 NATO intervention. Secondly, it discusses the refugees' positions vis-à-vis the conflict during the 1990s referring to data collected in the field during the interviews with a sample of Kosovar Albanian refugees. In order to analyse these data, I refer to existing typologies of refugees as described in Chapter 3, because they guide my understanding of

the findings and allow me to better structure the information collected. In particular I use typology of refugees of Zolberg et al. (1989), which is developed in relation to the refugees' position within a conflict and distinguishes three categories of refugees: activists, targets and victims. This enables me to explore Kosovo Albanians' relationship with the conflict and their reasons for the flight. I also use Kunz's analysis of refugees in flight and its kinetic model which allow me to explain how the refugees' position within a conflict can influence the modality of the flight and explain the different types of Kosovar Albanian emigration out of Kosovo during the 1990s. The findings are presented through a division which follows the structure of the interviews along the following points: the beginning of the conflict, life and plan for the future before the conflict, the reasons for the flight, the time and modalities of departure, and the final destination.

5.2 History, myths and legends

The literature on the ethnic tensions and conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo is considerable and reflects a wide spectrum of positions and interpretations characterised by two extremes: the pro-Serbian and the pro-Albanian ones. These extremes have led Morozzo della Rocca (1999) to assert that there are always two truths about Kosovo. Therefore, when approaching the subject it is necessary to distinguish facts and scientific data accepted by both sides from partial accounts and interpretations of events, and understand the impact of some biased theses on the development of the relationship between the two communities and on the conflict.

During the twentieth century both Albanians and Serbs have gone through bloody times in Kosovo and have been, in turns, responsible for and victims of atrocities. The origins of the crisis of the late 1990s, according to the Independent International Commission on Kosovo (2000) have to be understood through a consideration of the wave of nationalism that developed in the 1970s and 1980s, which was based on the rediscovery of myths and legends, and the reinterpretation of history.

In general, the origins of ethnic conflicts are thought to have roots going back hundreds of years and this is a common perception with respect to Kosovo as well. However,

it is not until the late nineteenth century that we can start talking about tensions between Albanians and Serbs in term of ethnic conflict (Malcolm, 1998; Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). This was the time when myths and stories, which had been kept alive in ballads and legends for centuries, acquired a different role and importance in the narratives of Serbian and Albanian national movements. They provided the basis for claiming the right to the territory and its governance, justified certain policies and contributed to the development of opposite nationalist historiographies.

We can distinguish three main historical elements that have been incorporated in the development of nationalist discourses and have played a role in the ethnic contraposition of Albanians and Serbs: the myth of the origin, the Kosovo Polje battle and 'the great migration'. We briefly discuss these below.

The historical debate about the origin of the Albanian or Serbian presence in Kosovo has played a central role in the nationalist interpretation of modern and contemporary political situations. The Albanian population in Kosovo claims to be the descendant of the earliest known inhabitants of that area of the Balkans, the Illyrians. On the other side, Serbian nationalists refer to the presence of many medieval monuments, churches and monasteries as evidence of the Slavic roots of Kosovo. The Albanian answer to the last claim is that the foundations of these monuments are often built on top of Illyrian archeological remains. Other arguments and counterarguments follow on the same line in order for each group to claim the most ancient roots in the area and, therefore, according to a certain nationalist logic, the right to live and govern in Kosovo.

The Kosovo Polje battle was fought and lost by the Serbs against the Ottoman Turks in 1389. In fact, the fourteenth century was characterised by the resistance to the Ottoman expansion. Between 1370 and 1380, the territory governed by Serbs was divided into different princedoms that faced the advance of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans which eventually led to the fall of the Serbian empire. The princes' response to the Ottoman expansion led either to the establishment of a pact of vassalage or to military resistance. Many battles were fought, but the battle of Kosovo Polje of 1389 in particular is still remembered and plays a central role in the contemporary Serb nationalist revival. Nev-

ertheless, little historical data about it is actually available. Malcolm (1998), Morozzo della Rocca (1999) and other authors agree that it is possible that several Albanians, who were still Christians, fought with the Serbs against the Muslim Turks, while at the same time, other Albanians from central and northern Albania, two areas which were already under Ottoman influence, fought with them.

The area corresponding approximately to the current Serbia and Kosovo was finally conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1459. Under the Islamic Ottoman rule Serbs and Christian Albanians, were considered 'hahl al kitab', people of the book, and were allowed to keep their faith and their traditions. They were subjected to the *dhimma*, or protection of life and property by the Muslim state, in return for paying of the *jizya*, a tax paid exclusively by non-Muslims living in a Muslim State ¹. Consequently, a number of people converted to Islam in order to avoid the payment of this tax and a treatment as second class subjects of the Empire. However, some Serbs began to leave Kosovo and move towards the centre of Serbia, this migration, remembered as 'the great migration', reshaped the demographic composition of Kosovo and is interpreted in different ways by Serbs and Albanians ². Together with the dispute about the origin of Kosovo and the battle of Kosovo Polje, it is part of both nationalist discourses.

Tensions about the demographic composition of the population of Kosovo and about emigration from Kosovo continued to be the centre of controversies even through the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, until the mass expulsions of Albanians that characterised the final phase of the 1999 conflict. Below is a general overview of the main phases of the Serbian-Albanian relations between the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and NATO's military campaign of 1999. The main aim of the following sections is that of highlighting the political, economic and social background to the conflict and understand the characteristics of the migration waves caused by it.

¹They remained with this status until the emancipation ordered by the Ottoman Sultan in the middle of the 19th century under pressure from the European powers.

²According to Serbian views, as a consequence of the void left by the emigration of the Serbs, Albanians from the mountains moved eastward into Kosovo. There are two Albanian interpretations of these events: initially, it was accepted that Albanians moved into Kosovo after the exodus of many Serbs in the late seventeenth century. However, this was seen and interpreted as a return to the homeland that they had left when driven out by the Serbs. Since the 1970s, the theory of the 'ethnic void' has been rejected. The new position claims that the Serbs appeared in Kosovo after the eleventh century and that even during their rule in Kosovo the majority of the population remained Albanian, even though some of them were assimilated by the Serbs.

5.3 World War I and World War II: demographic wars

The retreat of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans was followed by waves of ethnic cleansing whose main drive was the interest to avenge and possess the land that had been previously expropriated (Morozzo della Rocca, 1999). However, many of the Muslims that were expelled had been the owners of the land for centuries and many of them were Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians that had converted to Islam in order to keep the land that had belonged to their family and avoid paying the *jizya*.

In Kosovo, the 1878 Peace Accord that followed the defeat of the Ottoman Turks in the Russo-Ottoman War gave the Serbs control of Mitrovica/Mitrovice and Pristina/Prishtina. This peace settlement alerted the Albanian population and Albanian nationalists organised a meeting in Prizren, where delegates from Kosovo and Macedonia founded “The Prizren League”. The League also involved Albanian intellectuals who were inspired by ideas of the European Renaissance and were interested in the creation of an independent political entity that could unite all Albanian people under the umbrella of Ottoman rule.

In 1912, as a result of the Balkan war, Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks reduced the domain of the Ottoman Empire to Thrace. Serbia achieved independence and Kosovo came under Serbian authority ³. During the First World War, Kosovo was occupied by Austria-Hungarian and Bulgarian forces. The Austria-Hungarian declaration of war against Serbia was welcomed in Albania and, therefore, Serbia saw Albania and Albanians as its enemy. This led to guerrilla fighting between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo with atrocious acts committed on both sides and Albanian refugees fleeing into Albania.

The new ‘Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs’ was proclaimed in December 1918 and was dominated by Serbia; it included also Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. Kosovo, once more, became an integral part of Serbia. However, while the new Yugoslavia was predominantly a Slavic state, in Kosovo 64% of the population was Albanian (Vickers, 1998). In response, Albanians organised an armed resistance, known as the Kachak movement, against the Serbian power with the support of Northern Albania. The events unfolded following a typical chain of reactions in the

³In 1912, during the Conference of Ambassadors in London presided over by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, Serbia was given sovereignty over Kosovo.

Serbian-Albanian relations which usually lead to the reinforcement of mutual mistrust. As a consequence of the development of the Kachak movement, Albanians in Kosovo were increasingly seen by Serbs as part of an outlaw national liberation movement, against the Yugoslav constitution. The government of Belgrade decided to suppress the movement and use the situation to resolve the ethnic question in Kosovo. Several changes took place in order to reach the goal of either assimilating the Albanian population or 'encouraging' them to leave. For example, under the Yugoslav government their involvement in local government, the right to use Albanian language in their work and the opportunity to set up Albanian-language schools, which had been obtained when Austria-Hungarian and Bulgarian troops had moved into Kosovo, were lost (Malcolm, 1998). The Serb government did not consider the Albanian-speakers in Kosovo as an ethnic or national group, but as Serbs who spoke Albanian. By the 1930s there were no Albanian schools left, Albanians were denied the status of national minority and a programme of colonisation sending Slav-speaking settlers in the area had been set up (Malcolm, 1998). Some tens of thousands of Serb and Montenegrin settlers moved into Kosovo and at the end of the 1930s a plan for the mass deportation of Albanians to Anatolia had been outlined. As an example of the tactics used to 'encourage' Albanians to leave we can refer to a 1937 document of the government in Belgrade stating that the maximum size of the land-holding permitted, which was 0.4 hectares, was: "below the minimum for subsistence. But that is and has been our aim: to make their life impossible, and in that way to force them to emigrate" (Gilbert, 1998). Nevertheless, despite several attempts, between 1912 and 1941, the demographic balance of Kosovo changed very little.

During the Second World War, the roles switched and Albanians gained a position of strength that allowed them to start reverting the situation. During the war Albania was occupied by Italian forces in 1939. Just a year later Italy attacked Greece, the outcome of this was a situation of impasse that required the intervention of German troops. In 1941, Germany put the Yugoslav government under strong pressure to join the Tripartite Pact (Germany, Italy and Japan) in order to gain the right for their troops to pass through Yugoslavia to reach Greece from the North. Two days later an anti-axis coup took place, but as a result a few weeks later, Germany invaded Yugoslavia (Gilbert,

1998). Most of Kosovo was occupied by Albania with the exception of the important mining area surrounding Mitrovica/Mitrovice which remained under German control.

When Italy dropped out of the war in 1943, the Germans entered Kosovo and promised the province independence. According to Malcolm: "The German policy towards the newly acquired territory of Kosovo and Albania was to court the sympathy of the population by using the rhetoric of Albanian nationalism and Albanian independence [...]." (Malcolm, 1998). They raised an SS Division from among the Albanian population called the Skanderberg Division, whose role is still fuelling harsh historical controversies⁴.

What appears to be generally accepted is that during this time, the scenario was drastically reverted with Albanians trying to push out of Kosovo as many Serbs as possible. Having experienced the dream of unification with Albania, Kosovo Albanians defended the idea of Great Albania and very few of them joined the partisan resistance against the occupation led by Josip Broz, known as Marshall Tito in Yugoslavia. However, in the south of Albania, a group of communist Albanian partisans led by Enver Hoxha collaborated with Marshall Tito, in the resistance. When German troops finally left, the Balli Kombeter, the Albanian nationalists, had taken over the region until the partisans of Hoxha defeated them in Northern Albania first, and then, with the help of Tito's partisans, in Kosovo as well. When the war was over Hoxha accepted the border that existed before the war and Kosovo came back under Yugoslav power. In the aftermath of the war roles were switched once again and two interpretations of the events developed. The local historiography of Kosovo at the communist time exaggerated the contribution of Kosovar Albanians to the liberation movement in Yugoslavia, while on the Serbian side emphasis was given to the collaboration of Albanians with the fascist regime. A new period of persecution and forced migration of Albanians from Kosovo had started.

⁴According to Malcolm (1998) the recruitment, which was carried out in early 1944 was a disappointment because of an invisible resistance of the beys and agas who discouraged the enrolment; he concludes that the Skanderbeg division had never played a significant role as a combat force.

5.4 The aftermath of the II World War: Albanian migration and forced migration

From 1946 until 1967, severe repressive actions were taken against Albanians in Kosovo as they were perceived to be politically unreliable because of their wartime cooperation with the Axis powers. The 1946 Yugoslav constitution did not grant territorial autonomy to Kosovo, but rather defined it as an autonomous region under federal jurisdiction. The Yugoslav Federation recognised five nationalities (Serb, Croat, Slovene, Montenegrin and Macedonian), but Albanian was not one of them.

When Tito broke the relationship with Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia and Albania ended diplomatic relations. The Albanian president Hoxha remained loyal to Moscow and became a severe critic of Tito's policies, especially with relation to Yugoslav rule in Kosovo. Consequently, the Yugoslav secret police began to regard all Albanians in Kosovo as potential traitors and spies. The Yugoslav government took action to disarm them, house to house, and thousands of them were arrested. Malcolm (1998) explains that the repression got to such a point that many Albanian families bought a weapon in order to have something to give to the Yugoslav police and avoid the harsh punishments.

The atmosphere of suspicion, mistrust and hostility led many Albanians to consider emigration. Emigration was also induced by the fact that the Communist regime imposed restrictions on religious practice, therefore abolishing the şeriat courts, the Koranic schools and the dervish orders (Malcolm, 1998). Moreover, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Yugoslav authorities encouraged people in Kosovo and Macedonia to identify as 'Turks' by nationality by declaring the Turks as a national minority and setting up new Turkish schools ⁵. In 1953, this policy began to be regarded as a plot to remove large numbers of Albanians when Yugoslavia signed a treaty with Turkey and Greece which provided for cooperation in security and defence measures and permitted a large-scale emigration of 'Turks' from Yugoslavia to Turkey.

The economic situation of the region was another incentive to migrate since, immediately

⁵The 1953 Census showed that the number of people registered as Turks in Kosovo had gone from 1,315 in the last Census of 1948 to 34,583.

after the war, Yugoslavia was one of the poorest countries in Europe and Kosovo was the poorest part of the country. In 1946, the average income in Slovenia, the richest of the republics, was three times greater than in Kosovo and in 1964 it was five times more. Tracing in detail the emigration of Albanians from Kosovo between the 1950s and 1970s is not an easy task because little statistical evidence of their migration is available since they were often registered in the country of migration as Yugoslavs or as Turks. Blumi explains that:

“[...] contrary to common views held about European migration, large numbers of immigrants from the 1950s onwards were not ‘Turkish’ or ‘Yugoslav’ men seeking jobs. Rather, many of these men (and their families) were coming from a variety of ethno-linguistic backgrounds and personally did not associate themselves with these two ‘identities’. [...] Not only were many of these ‘Yugoslavs’ and ‘Turks’ actually Kurdish or Albanian speakers, but in large part they were persecuted ‘minorities’ in their countries of origin as well. This meant the overwhelming majority of Albanians came to West Europe on entirely different pretexts than those with whom they were ultimately associated in the 1950-1980 period. Being a Turkish or Yugoslav guest worker and being a victim of political violence were two entirely different experiences, experiences which were all but erased by the very associations attached to being ‘ethnically’ linked to the immediate countries from which they came.” (Blumi, 2003, p.952)

Blumi (2003) also explains that in certain instances many of the expellees who passed through Turkey identified themselves as Yugoslavs themselves, because at that time when one was asked from where he/she was originally from, it was more likely that the answer would not be Kosovo, or a specific town, but Yugoslavia. He claims that his empirical research shows that even those who had been uprooted from their homes in Yugoslavia and forced to migrate to Turkey actively stated to be Yugoslav in Western Europe.

For most Kosovar Albanian migrants the main destinations were Germany and Switzer-

land. They grouped themselves around village or regional loyalties rather than a national group, since there was no sense of a larger community to set up organisational goals. The reason for this was also that the people who migrated before the 1980s had never had the chance to live in a political or cultural environment which promoted their Albanian identity. None of the people from the first generation of expellees interviewed by Blumi for his study, had studied Albanian at school and the majority of them grew up reading about Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia in Serbian texts (Blumi, 2003).

Eventually, new Yugoslav policies in Kosovo during the 1970s introduced some degree of autonomy in the region and opened the possibility to be educated in Albanian language and celebrate Albanian identity. This created a new social environment which had an impact on the political scene of Kosovo after Marshall Tito's death and on the new waves of Albanian emigration of the 1980s which joined the others.

5.5 The 1970s - 1980s: the changing face of Kosovar Albanian migration

The life of Albanians in Kosovo changed in the late 1960s when Tito decided to abandon the idea of creating a homogeneous 'Yugoslavism' and encouraged more elements of national self-direction (Malcolm, 1998). A series of cultural reforms followed and the use of the Albanian language and the study of Albanian history and culture were officially permitted. The reforms included the establishment of a university in Pristina/Prishtina, the employment of Albanian professors, the Albanisation of administration, security and public investment (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).

These developments continued and intensified until Kosovo became an autonomous province with the 1974 constitution and, more importantly, an equal constitutional element of the Federation as one of eight federal units. The new constitution gave autonomous provinces the right to issue their own constitution. Kosovo also had its own assembly and judiciary; however, it did not have the right to secede from the federation as Yugoslav republics did ⁶. These reforms opened new possibilities for Albanian politi-

⁶This was possible because only nations had the right to their own republic, while nationalities did

cal aspirations and, more importantly, generated the cultural/pedagogical environment conducive to the formation of a generation of politically-sophisticated activists (Blumi, 2003).

Nevertheless, from an economic point of view Kosovo was still the poorest area of Yugoslavia. This situation was made worse since between 1961 and 1981 the proportion of Albanians in the population of Kosovo rose from 67% to 78%. This was due both to the high birth rate of Albanians and to outmigration of Serbs and Montenegrins. Actual emigration by Serbs and Montenegrins during this period was probably around 100,000, although much higher figures were claimed in Belgrade. In fact, emigration was high among all communities, mainly because of the stagnating economic situation of Kosovo in comparison with other parts of Yugoslavia (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).

In 1980 Marshal Tito died and his death marked the beginning of the end of a unified Yugoslavia whose unity was closely associated with him. Nationalist demands for a higher degree of autonomy started to grow among the various ethnic groups of Yugoslavia. The state-run socialist economy continued to stagnate and there was increasing resentment of centralised government control. Nationalist politicians looked for scapegoats to blame for the difficult economic times and their political rhetoric fomented ethnic tensions.

In the spring of 1981 clashes occurred in Kosovo between the Serbian administration and numerous Kosovar Albanians calling for status as the seventh republic. The first demonstrators in the streets of Pristina/Prishtina were students and they were followed by other parts of the population protesting about the conditions of Albanians in Kosovo who considered themselves as victims of an unfair federal system. By then, the unemployment level in Kosovo was the highest in Yugoslavia and Serbs and Montenegrins who were 15% of the total population held 30% of the jobs available in state-run enterprises (Malcolm, 1998). The police brutally crushed the protest killing some demonstrators and arresting thousands of others who were then sentenced from one month to fifteen years of imprisonment. A state of emergency was declared and police and military units from all over Yugoslavia were sent into Kosovo.

not. In fact, Albanians in Kosovo, like Hungarians in Vojvodina, were considered as a nationality rather than as a nation like Croats, Slovenians and Serbs, because their nations had a homeland elsewhere.

More than 200,000 Albanians emigrated from Kosovo as a consequence of the suppression of the demonstrations. Some of them were highly engaged in politics and regrouped into political organisations registered legally in the countries of migration. Over 20 organisations existed, among which were the Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo, the World Union of Kosovo, the New Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo or the Federation of Trade Unions of Kosovo (Blumi, 2003).

Blumi highlights the new aspect of this second wave of Albanian emigration from Kosovo asserting that:

“The massacre of Albanian students in 1981, which marked the apex of collective Albanian consciousness in an organised form, finally transformed Kosova into an international issue with corresponding political consequences for those who were targeted by the Yugoslav state (Mertus, 1999, p.11-29). Aside from the several thousand Kosovars imprisoned for long terms, thousands more fled to Europe to settle in what little there was of an organised Albanian diaspora. What is important to note is the dramatic difference between this new, now politically educated generation of expellees and their largely rural and uneducated predecessors. This post-Rankovic generation constituted a dramatic change in Kosovar (and Albanian) intra-communal relations for they had been politicized in an environment that at once enabled them to organise as Albanians (the Albanian language was now permitted in schools and Prishtina University) and persecuted them for such mobilization.” (Blumi, 2003, p.960)

During the 1980s, Albanian emigration from Kosovo brought a new sense of identity to the community abroad and a new political awareness. The main European destinations were still Germany and Switzerland and it was not until the early 1990s that other European countries, including Italy and the UK, started to be considered as possible destinations. During the 1990s, the escalation of events in Kosovo led to further diverse waves of migration/forced migration.

5.6 Kosovo: 1980s and 1990s

The 1980s were a period of austerity for the whole country. Despite several investments in the area, Kosovo remained the poorest region of Yugoslavia and tensions about the ways in which resources were distributed were incorporated in the nationalist debate (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). While on the one hand, Serbia was considering the withdrawal of the autonomy of Kosovo as the solution to its economic situation, on the other hand, Albanian activists believed that the general state of poverty of Kosovo was precisely due to the fact that they did not have total control over their economic life and demanded republic status.

The 1981 events gave rise to a series of reciprocal accusations used by both Albanian and Serb nationalists. In Serbia, intellectuals, the press and the general public were caught up in a spiral of growing hatred and mistrust fuelled by speculations about alleged violent attacks on the Serbian community in Kosovo, the rediscovery of myths and legends from the past and reciprocal scapegoating.

After Tito's death, many Serbs began to rediscover their old national myths and Kosovo regained a special historical significance. The Serbs of Kosovo complained about being a disadvantaged minority under the political and economic domination of the Kosovo Albanian community and talked about discrimination and unpunished violent attacks against them (OSCE, 1999). Moreover, rumours about Albanians raping or murdering Serbs in Kosovo spread in Belgrade and, despite the fact that these claims were never confirmed by official figures, they had a great impact on the rising ethnic tensions and level of intolerance. In 1986, a part of the intelligentsia at the Serbian Academy of Sciences published a Memorandum where it was claimed that since 1981 Albanians in Kosovo had carried out genocide against the Serbs.

A year later, in 1987, Slobodan Milosevic, then deputy-president of the Serbian Party, visited Kosovo for the first time. While he was meeting the representatives of the Serb local community in Kosovo Polje/Fushe Kosove, many people demonstrated outside the building in their support. The police drove back the demonstrators using batons and they fought back. Milosevic decided to address the crowd and in front of television

cameras he stated firmly that no one should dare to beat them (OSCE, 1999). Although his political career had not developed within a nationalist political culture, during this visit, he seized the moment embracing the nationalist cause and his speech about the rights of Serbs in Kosovo turned him instantly into a national hero. In 1988, during a rally in Belgrade, he declared: "Every nation has a love, which eternally warms its heart. For Serbia, it is Kosovo" (Mertus, 1999). Milosevic's 'reconquest' of Kosovo had started and the main steps can be summarised as follows:

- the promotion of Serb colonisation of Kosovo, family planning for Albanians and restrictions on the sale of properties to them;
- the public gathering in June 1989 to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo Polje battle of 1389;
- the submission of a proposal to change the constitution in order to revoke the state of autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina;
- the harsh repression of strikes and demonstration of 1989;
- the proclamation of the state of emergency in Kosovo and the consequent heavy presence of Serbian military and police forces on the territory and, finally, the final revocation of Kosovo autonomy in 1990 (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).

Therefore, during the 1990s, under Slobodan Milosevic's government, Kosovars experienced once more exclusion from government, repression of their political opposition and the de-Albanianisation of cultural and educational institutions followed by re-Serbianisation. Street names were changed from Albanian to Serbian; Albanian language newspapers, radios and television channels were closed, as well as the Albanian Institute. Moreover, a new Serbian curriculum was imposed for universities and schools. The 1990 Milosevic's government removed Kosovo's autonomy through a change in the Serbian constitution that redefined Kosovo as a region in Serbia, with administrative and executive control in the hands of the Serbian National Assembly.

5.6.1 A *de facto* apartheid regime

On the 2nd of July 1990, 114 out of 123 Albanian members of the Kosovo Assembly rejected the new constitutional proposals of Serbia; they declared Kosovo independent of Serbia and a full constituent republic within the federation of Yugoslavia. In retaliation, the government dissolved Kosovo's provincial assembly, taking over its responsibilities. In September, the same year, at a secret meeting, Albanian representatives of the dissolved Assembly of Kosovo passed the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. The government's response was the dismissal of Albanian employees from government and state positions and the censorship of the independent Albanian media, in addition to the restriction of political and cultural expression by the Albanian population (Malcolm, 1998).

From 1992 to 1998 life in Kosovo was governed by a *de facto* apartheid regime, with Albanians and Serbs living parallel existences. The Serbs occupied institutional and public positions and controlled the economy while Albanians run a 'parallel state' led by Ibrahim Rugova, who had been elected president of the self-proclaimed republic after an election held in defiance of Serbian authorities in 1992.

While other Albanian political leaders, such as Adem Demaqi e Rexhep Qosia, promoted a strong resistance against the Serbian power, Rugova opted for a non-violent strategy whose main goals were: to stop the regime, maintain the Albanian community and its way of life, prevent war by avoiding being provoked to violence and win international support against the regime (Clark, 2002). In order to achieve these goals, he established a 'shadow' government whose members were abroad and his party the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK) organised the community in Kosovo. They established parallel structures of state including political, cultural, educational, and media systems. The main focus of this parallel apparatus was on the health-care, education and a social security network that provided basic necessities for families in need. The system was financed by a voluntary taxation system, which Albanians living both in Kosovo and in exile paid to the 'shadow' government ⁷. The organisation was quite successful

⁷The suggested guidelines indicated around 5% of the income for employed individuals, between 8% and 10% for businesses and 3% for workers in the Diaspora.

in Kosovo and its strategy of non-violent resistance also promoted the view that the source of violence in Kosovo was primarily the regime (Clark, 2002). Throughout most of the 1990s, the LDK had managed to obtain several high-level diplomatic meetings with foreign governments, however, until 1997 Kosovo received sporadic attention from the international community with the only exception of some NGOs.

In fact, from the mid-1990s people's confidence in Rugova's leadership and his strategy began to be questioned. While during an initial phase this strategy had brought a sense of empowerment, its inability to raise active support from the international community spread a general sense of hopeless frustration (Clark, 2002).

In 1996 an agreement on education between the LDK and the Belgrade Ministry of Education was reached with the mediation of an Italian catholic organisation *Comunità di Sant Egidio*. This agreement was never implemented, but it opened the possibility to negotiate for a peaceful solution of the situation. A few proposals were discussed by intellectuals in both Belgrade and Pristina/Prishtina. For example, the President of the Academy of Sciences, Aleksandr Despic, proposed a plan for a peaceful secession of Kosovo while others proposed a 'three republics' solution according to which Kosovo should be given equal status to Montenegro (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). Overall, none of the diplomatic efforts translated into concrete plans of action, bringing new doubts about the efficacy of the non-violent struggle. In addition to this, in the desperation to stop the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo was not included in the Dayton negotiations. The strategy of the LDK was held responsible for the stagnant political situation and several Kosovar intellectuals criticised Rugova for excessive passivity and discussed alternative strategies; for example Professor Rexhap Qosja argued for a more active non-violent resistance and Adem Demaqi talked about civil disobedience. People started to believe that violent resistance could be the only realistic solution.

It was at this time, that the *Ushtria Clirimtare Kosovs* (UCK), the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), an organisation based in Switzerland, emerged as an opposition force claiming responsibility for the killing of a Serb policeman that had happened in 1995. At that time most Albanians had not heard of the existence of the KLA and many thought

that the attacks were masterminded by the Yugoslav authorities in order to provoke their reaction (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). Between 1996 and 1998 they eliminated around thirty people, suspected Albanian ‘collaborators’ and Serb policemen, using terrorist hit-and-run tactics.

The Serbian government considered the KLA a terrorist organisation and as a response to their increasing activities, police in Kosovo intensified the repression. Several human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Humanitarian Law Centre, and others documented illegal searches, arbitrary arrests, torture, restrictions on the media and many other abuses. The police targeted members of the KLA and the LDK, activists and also civilians.

5.6.2 The escalation of violence

In late February 1998, Yugoslav forces attacked several villages in the Drenica area, a known base of KLA activities. The fighting continued for several days. A particular target was Adem Jashari, a KLA leader, and on the 5th of March an attack was launched on the houses of his clan killing 58 people, including women and children (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).

The massacre of Drenica represents a turning point in the escalation of the conflict. The general doubts about the non-violent tactics of the LDK increased and people started to place their hopes on the KLA. After Drenica, every Serbian military action had the effect of attracting more young Albanians to the KLA and further internationalising the conflict.

The escalation of violence called for immediate intervention from the international community. In March 1998, some international sanctions against Serbia were discussed in order to back up the Contact Group’s⁸ call for negotiations on Kosovo’s autonomy in the hope to avoid the use of force. The sanctions were eventually introduced in late April and, in addition to that, the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo under Resolution 1160 of 30 March (OSCE, 1999).

⁸The Contact Group formed in 1994 in response to the conflict in Bosnia and included US, Russia, GB, France, Germany and Italy

In Serbia, in April 1998, Milosevic gained overwhelming support in a referendum and in June, ignoring the warning of European governments, Serb forces started to force villagers out of their homes and then burned them (OSCE, 1999). As the situation worsened on the ground, negotiations became more difficult and were finally interrupted by the start of the war. The KLA had gained strength and, initially, they had managed to extend their control in the area, but when new Yugoslav forces arrived in Kosovo, they suffered a strong counter attack. Many fighters were helped by Albanian families and found refuge in their houses. As a consequence, Serb forces attacked and destroyed villages and farm houses. Soon, the KLA realised that they could not make it on their own and that international support was indispensable. New efforts were put into spreading news about the suffering of the Albanian population in Kosovo in the attempt to involve the international community and the Diaspora had a great role in this.

During summer, the destruction and the violence increased, around 500 Albanians were killed, about 300 villages were destroyed and aid agencies estimated that some 200,000-300,000 Albanians were driven from their homes between April and September 1998 (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). Many of them fled: approximately 60,000 crossed to neighboring Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, others were hosted in other villages in Kosovo, but many (about 50,000) were still wandering around without a shelter (Morozzo della Rocca, 1999).

The military defeat of the KLA, the level of destruction and the fact that the international community had not intervened had a demoralising effect on the Albanian population, the number of fighters in the KLA ranks decreased and many went back to their jobs abroad. With winter approaching, the humanitarian crisis worsened and the images of homeless people wandering in the woods shown by the media touched public opinion in many countries and put pressure on foreign governments to reopen diplomatic negotiations.

On the 23th of September 1998, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1199, which called for: a cease-fire in Kosovo, international observers to monitor the situation on the ground, the withdrawal of forces, and negotiations on the future of Kosovo (OSCE, 1999). The US Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke, representing the Contact Group, managed

to negotiate with Milosevic who accepted to allow refugees to return to their homes, withdraw some forces and allow 2000 unarmed OSCE observer in Kosovo. The OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (OSCE-KVM) began to be operative from November.

The Milosevic-Holbrooke agreement seemed to be making progress for two months, despite a number of violations of the cease-fire. In the meantime, US and European diplomats continued to promote a Kosovo settlement, excluding the KLA in the process (OSCE, 1999). However, with the majority of the Serbian forces out of Kosovo, the KLA managed to reorganise, retrain and take advantage of the situation. The peace accord was internationally understood as an agreement between Serbs and Albanians, but no Albanian representatives were asked to sign, therefore the KLA did not feel bound by it (Morozzo della Rocca, 1999). The KLA could launch offensive attacks, but if the Serbian forces reacted they were officially breaching the terms of the agreement. The situation quickly became very tense and violence escalated again on both sides producing both Serb and Albanian victims. In January 1999 the Serb army moved a large number of troops in Kosovo, on the 15th of January they assaulted the Racak village where they executed 45 Albanians.

5.6.3 The Rambouillet peace talks

The international community condemned the massacre and NATO threatened military action against the FRY if the cease-fire was not restored. In a further attempt to avoid the use of force, the Contact Group called for new peace talks about the future of Kosovo to be held in February in Rambouillet, France. Leaders from both sides were invited. This time Albanians were represented by both LDK and KLA leaders and Hashim Thaqi, leader of the KLA supported by the US, acted as the main representative of the Albanian community.

The key points proposed in the plan stipulated that:

“The UCK must be disarmed within three months (the provision they most strongly opposed) and all Yugoslav/Serbian troops withdrawn from Kosovo apart from 1,400 border guards and 2,500 security forces. A 30,000-member

NATO 'enabling force' would be deployed in Kosovo (the provision most strongly opposed by the Serbian leadership) to ensure implementation of the agreement. For a three-year interim period, Kosovo would have autonomous institutions once again, as before 1989, including its own elected assembly, president and constitutional court. There would be greater devolution of power, however, to the province's municipalities, in areas such as policing. More contentiously, the different 'national communities' of Kosovo would have powers to block legislation if it threatened their national interest, and official posts would be divided up among them on a quota basis. At the end of the three years, there would be a further international meeting "to determine a mechanism for a final settlement" - a formula which did not exclude independence, although the Contact Group was known to be against it." (OSCE, 1999, p.23)

Initially, Thaqi, refused to sign, but in March, when a second attempt to reach an agreement was made in Paris, he signed. The Serbian leaders refused to do so and, on the 20th of March, when news of 30,000 Serbian troops and irregular militia units being deployed spread, OSCE-KVM was pulled out. Four days later the aerial attacks on the FRY began with NATO attacking without an explicit authorisation of the UN Security Council.

NATO air strikes continued until June and the action was formally suspended on the 10th of June when it was confirmed that Serbian forces had started to withdraw under a peace plan contained in the UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

Between March and June 1999 forces of the FRY and Serbia launched a vicious campaign against the Kosovo Albanian population and expelled some 863,000 from Kosovo. The large majority of expellees stayed in the region in Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro (FRY) or Bosnia-Herzegovina. An estimated 590,000 were internally displaced within Kosovo and remained in the province throughout the conflict (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).

The UNHCR had to set up a complicated operation in order to assist the refugees. The

organisation faced both practical and diplomatic problems because of the scale of the crisis and the tense political environment.

According to Morris:

“UNHCR found itself engaged in an operation as difficult and complex as any we have faced. Great practical problems of assistance were compounded by major protection problems. Macedonia was reluctant to give asylum. In Montenegro the Kosovan Albanians found a government ready to protect them if it could but were threatened by the presence of Federal security forces. KLA recruitment gathered pace. Many families were separated and the number of missing family members grew. A multitude of practical, protection and political problems had to be addressed in a highly charged political environment in which the stakes for the governments concerned were very high indeed.” (Morris, 1999, p.15)

The EU states solution to the refugee crisis was reception in the neighbouring countries of Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. However, the high number of refugees crossing the borders every day and the level of emergency in the refugee camps put a strain on neighbouring country. As a response, in April 1999, the UNHCR organised the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP) that evacuated refugees to 40 different countries.

A peace plan was finally accepted by FRY President Milosevic and approved by the Serbian National Assembly on the 3rd of June. The main terms of the agreement included that:

“[...] all Serbian forces should be withdrawn, and all refugees allowed to return. The UCK and any other armed Kosovo Albanian groups were to “end immediately all offensive actions” and comply with requirements for demilitarization. Implementation would be overseen by KFOR, an “effective international security presence with substantial NATO participation”, meaning in practice a 50,000-strong joint NATO-Russian peacekeeping force, and

by a 3,000-member UN civilian security force. Kosovo would have a civilian administrator, appointed by the UN Secretary-General, overseeing the establishment of “substantial autonomy” for Kosovo within the FRY and “provisional and democratic institutions” under an interim administration “pending a final settlement”. No time limit was set on the life of the interim administration, nor was any specific mention made of a referendum on Kosovo’s future status.” (OSCE, 1999, p.24)

Overall, the 1990s were a decade of emigration from Kosovo. At different stages, Albanians fled from discrimination and persecution and the outflow reflected some of the main events in the area. We can generally talk about two main groups, people arriving in countries of destination spontaneously, throughout the decade and during the weeks of NATO’s bombing campaign, and refugees arriving as part of the evacuation programme set up by the UNHCR and IOM during the refugee crisis of April-May 1999.

As we have seen, the emigrant community abroad played a central role in the political and social development of Kosovo during the 1990s, starting with their support to the parallel state structures set up by the LDK, their help to new waves of emigrants in the reception countries, their later involvement with the KLA and their active political role in the attempt to bring the situation of Kosovo at the attention of the international community. Below is a more detailed examination of the position of Kosovar Albanian refugees within the 1990s conflict and an analysis of their flight. In the following sections, I distinguish various types of emigrants by connecting the events described above to the results of the fieldwork and explaining how the Albanians I interviewed in the UK and Italy are represented in these categories.

5.7 Refugees, conflict and flight

In order to examine the ways in which the conflict affected people’s lives and their plans about the future, it was necessary to understand when they considered the conflict to have started and find out about their ways of living and expectations about their future before the conflict began.

5.7.1 Beginning of the conflict

There are different events that can be considered as the beginning of the conflict: Tito's death in 1981, Milosevic first visit to Kosovo in 1987, the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy of 1990, the intensification of KLA's activities 1996-1997, the beginning of NATO air bombing campaign of 1999.

Several respondents referred to the death of Marshal Tito as the beginning of the problems for Kosovo and Yugoslavia in general, and described the years of Tito's regime with affection remembering the times of Kosovo's autonomy with nostalgia. One of the respondents said that after Tito's death everything started to go wrong:

"Dall' 1981, guarda, quando Tito è morto tutto è andato storto." Behar (M, 30+, m, arr:1991, construction site manager⁹)

None of them mentioned the hard times Kosovo Albanians went through in the early decades of Tito's regime; this is mostly due to the fact that the vast majority was too young to be able to remember the repression of 1950s and 1960s. Some respondents talked about the poor economic conditions of Kosovo during the 1970s and the 1980s and about widespread discrimination against Albanians. As a matter of fact, as explained earlier, the 1980s were especially troubled times. The political tensions started to rise after Marshall Tito's death when ethnic Albanians began to demonstrate against discrimination and asked for republic status for Kosovo. The protests were repressed by the police and the government tried to reassert control over the province through constitutional changes which limited its autonomy. Further demonstrations took place against these changes and, as a response the government imposed a state of emergency in 1989 and, in July of the following year, suspended the local parliament and government of Kosovo. Despite these events, until the end of the decade, people did enjoy the benefits of Kosovo's autonomy and this aspect dominated their accounts.

⁹In the quotations from the interviews with refugees: capital 'M' stands for Male and capital 'F' for Female; '20+', '30+', '40+', etc. indicate if, at the time of the interviews, a respondent was in his/her twenties, thirties, forties and so on. The small 'm' and the small 's' indicate whether the interviewee was married or single, 'arr:' followed by a year, refers to the refugee's time of arrival in the country of exile; finally, there is a reference to the employment condition of the respondent

“Before the war, we (Albanians) had a normal life in Kosova. We had the poorest jobs and our employers were mainly Serbs, especially in the factories. But in the villages people had more chances to work on their own land with animals and, in any case you see, many men were abroad to work and sent money to the families, so it was not too bad. At least we could speak our language and send our children to study.” Ardian (M, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

The date they all identified as the beginning of the conflict in Kosovo is 1990, the year of the revocation of Kosovo’s autonomy. This is mostly because, as I explained earlier in the chapter, the new constitution revoking Kosovo’s autonomy was followed by radical changes that affected all aspects of the life of ethnic Albanians in the province. Firstly, the judiciary system came under Serbian control and its independence and the guarantee of fair trials became questionable, and increasingly harsher restrictions were imposed on the media, Albanian schools were shut down, people were dismissed from their jobs in the public sector and general police harassment of ethnic Albanians increased. In February 1993, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the FRY, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, expressed his worries in a report to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session (A/47/666), denouncing the human rights situation in Kosovo, the mass dismissal of Albanians from the public sector, police brutality, the lack of freedom of the media and problems concerning education. The report stated that:

“The situation of human rights has been constantly worsening since Kosovo lost its status as an autonomous province in July 1990. The Albanian population has been enduring various forms of discrimination as a result of new laws adopted by the Republic of Serbia and the economic situation has deteriorated to the extent that even the subsistence of many Albanian families is threatened.” (Mazowiecki, 1993, p.35)

The refugees I interviewed suffered the direct consequences of the changes brought by the new constitution, whether they were actively involved in the political life of Kosovo or not, therefore they considered this event as the start of the conflict in the province.

Denis affirmed:

“For me the problems started in 1989-1990 when Milosevic took away our autonomy and started to ask people to support his regime if they wanted to keep their jobs” Denis (M, 20+, s, arr:1995, factory worker)

Jetmir also said that after the changes brought by Milosevic’s government in 1990 many people had to leave:

“Dopo quello che ha fatto Milosevic nel ’90 molti sono dovuti partire.” Jetmir (M, 40+, m, arr:1995, unemployed)

Saimir explained that he left in 1991 because problems in Kosovo had already started, factories were shut and young men risked persecution:

“Io sono scappato nel ’91, I problemi erano già cominciati, hanno chiuso molte fabbriche e noi giovani maschi rischiavano di essere arrestati e torturati.” Saimir (M, 30+, m, arr:1991, shepherd)

In conclusion, the respondents felt that problems for Kosovo started with the death of Marshal Tito in 1980, but they recognised 1990, the year when Kosovo’s autonomy was removed, as the beginning of the conflict. Having established this, it was necessary now to learn more about life before and after 1990 and ask about the ways in which the conflict affected not only their everyday life, but also their ideas and plans for the future.

5.7.2 Life before the conflict: hopes and expectations for the future

Many respondents described life before 1990 as relatively peaceful. Those who were over 35 years of age at the time of the interview (2001-03) remembered the seventies and the eighties, the times when the autonomy of Kosovo had allowed Albanians to be involved in the administration, to study in Albanian schools and to live ‘a normal life’.

Before the conflict started to escalate, the worries and hopes for the future were those common to lots of people and families in many other parts of the world. People hoped to grow and develop as individuals in their private and professional life, some hoped to start a family, others wished for a good education for their children and for good job prospects for them. Pal said that before the problems started, he had a good life in Kosovo, he was teaching chemistry in high school and hoped that his children could have the same chance to study and build a good career, then the schools were closed and he lost his job, his family, he lost everything, even hope:

“Avevo una buona vita in Kosova prima di tutti problemi. Ero professore, insegnavo chimica a ragazzi da 14 a 18 anni. Speravo di continuare con il lavoro e speravo di potere fare studiare anche i miei figli, ma poi hanno chiuso le scuole e ho perso il lavoro, abbiamo perso tutto, anche la speranza” Pal (M, 50+, m, arr:1994, factory worker)

Stela talked about the changes her family had to go through:

“The conflict started in the early '90s and before we had a normal life, happy life. My husband is a sport doctor and he had nice job, I worked for the government. We have four children, two sons and two daughters. My children had two holidays each year, one on the sea and one skiing. At weekend we go around visit other places and countries. In the early 1990s the problems started and my three oldest children came to the UK and stayed here. The situation for young people was very bad. You know, the university was closed, schools were stopped and we lost our jobs. At that time we hoped that the situation could become better soon, to go back to our usual life, but it didn't.” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

As for the future of Kosovo, some respondents said that at that time they hoped that Kosovo could one day become independent.

“We wanted a better future for Kosova, we wanted to have more control about the life of our country. The autonomy of '74 was good, but not enough. If

Croatia, Slovenia and the others were republics why not Kosova? We were discriminated in our own house, after years of autonomy we were still poor, we needed more power to bring more changes.” Ardian (M, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

The younger generations have no memory of peaceful times in Kosovo. For them, peace in Kosovo represents either an early childhood memory or their hope for the future. Most of them grew up attending the classes set up in private homes and garages by the Albanian parallel government of Kosovo, many of them saw their parents losing their jobs and some had been arrested or beaten up. Those who remained in Kosovo until the late 1990s saw their villages destroyed, their families and neighbours beaten or killed and the women raped.

“My childhood was generally nice, but my adolescence was undermined by so many problems! You cannot imagine how it was! People were jailed for no reasons or murdered and many just disappeared. All this was going on while me and my friends were already facing the problems that we all have at that age, you know, just growing up, I guess! My cousin was put in jail for 7 years and she did not even know why. Her sister was put in jail as well for 2 days because she was part of a student group. They let her go so soon because her father managed to put a lot of pressure on them.” Albana (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, employee)

Tonin said that all he could remember about his family is troubles, in the community, in school, at work, only problems. He is too young to remember anything different. His brothers left in 1992 to avoid joining the army and to look for a job abroad. They were sending money back and the family were just getting by, until one day a large number of people of his village were massacred under his own eyes and more than 147 people were killed.

“Mi ricordo solo problemi, sempre problemi, a scuola, al lavoro, solo cose terribili e problemi. Sono troppo giovane per ricordare tempi più tranquilli,

non ho conosciuto niente di diverso io. I miei fratelli sono partiti nel '92 per evitare il servizio militare obbligatorio sotto i Serbi e per trovare un lavoro in Svizzera. Ci mandavano dei soldi e andavamo avanti. Poi tutto è scoppiato. Un giorno sono arrivati al villaggio ed hanno massacrato tutti sotto i miei occhi. Hanno fatto un massacro, prima hanno ammazzato 147 persone, poi altre 5 e poi altre 28." Tonin (M, 20+, s, arr:1999, builder)

Generally, the expectations about the future of young generations (under 35 between 2001-2003) were heavily conditioned by these kind of experiences. Those who were children during the 1990s grew up attending the schools set up by the parallel Albanian government in which the conditions for learning were not ideal and their final certificates were recognised only by the Albanian parallel structures.

Ermal explained that his grand father was the first Kosovar Albanian who took a degree in a certain subject and he received his certificate during an official ceremony from Marshal Tito in person. In the family, they consider education as a really important achievement for their future and they were generally very good at school. All the grandchildren wanted to study medicine and become doctors, but when the conflict started and the schools were closed they were forced to continue studying in the self-organised schools in private houses. As a result, the standard of teaching dropped significantly and they begun to realise that their plans to study medicine and become doctors became less and less feasible and more of a dream. Moreover, the documents and certificates from their schools were not recognised by other authorities in and outside of Kosovo.

"Mio nonno è stato il primo Kossovaro Albanese a prendere la laurea in ..; il Maresciallo Tito in persona gli ha consegnato il diploma in una cerimonia ufficiale importante. Tutti nella mia famiglia pensiamo che studiare è importantissimo per avere un buon futuro ed eravamo tutti bravi a scuola. Tutti noi nipoti volevamo studiare medicina e diventare dottori, ma quando tutto è iniziato ed hanno chiuso le scuole abbiamo dovuto continuare a studiare negli scantinati e nelle case private. Il livello si è abbassato tanto e abbiamo capito che diventare dottori sarebbe stato impossibile se si continuava così,

medicina era un sogno e basta. E poi nessuno accetta o riconosce i documenti delle nostre scuole.” Ermal (M, 19, s, arr:1999, student)

The childhood and teenage years of the young interviewees were dominated by the conflict and they did not know what living in peace meant until they arrived to the country of exile. When leaving Kosovo they either followed their parents or families or, if they had left on their own they were most likely to be away from their country, friends and families for the first time. In certain cases they had faced direct persecution or violence and at that time the main worry was about survival. Their hopes and expectations about their future were heavily influenced by the conflict and the simple plan to study for a certain degree to acquire a certain profession became simply untenable.

“My generation, we had dreams, yes we did dream, but we learnt soon that reality was a different story, it was all about surviving.” Albana (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, employee)

The conflict had a strong impact on people's lives since both their daily existence and their future projects were disrupted by the events. While the older respondents were able to describe the changes in detail and remembered the years before the conflict with nostalgia, the youngsters, could not remember much about life before the conflict. Nevertheless, they also had a clear understanding of the impact it had had on their past, present and future.

5.7.3 The reasons for the flight

The growing ethnic tensions between Serbs and Albanians after the loss of Kosovo's autonomy, the persecution of political opponents, the violation of human rights and the poor economic conditions of the region were the main reasons behind the emigration of many Kosovo Albanians during the 1990s. Although the majority of the people I interviewed left Kosovo for fear of persecution, it is also clear that economic factors were often strictly intertwined with the political scenario and that some people might have appeared to be economic migrants. However, even when this seemed to be the case,

persecution was the main reason for their flight as people had lost their jobs because of their ethnicity, their political engagement or the destruction brought by the war between 1998 and 1999.

In order to better understand the reasons for the flight in relation to the position of the refugees within the conflict, it is helpful to use Zolberg et al. (1989)'s typology of refugees, which distinguishes between 'activists', 'targets' and 'victims'. In the case of the Kosovar Albanian refugee population two of the three types proposed by their typology are especially relevant as I explain below: activists and targets.

Given the characteristics of the ethnic conflict in Kosovo, with two main ethnic groups confronting each other from different positions of power, Zolberg et al.'s definition of 'target' as "a social or cultural group that has been singled out for the abuse of state power" (Zolberg et al., 1989, p.30) can describe the situation of Kosovo Albanians. In many phases of the conflict during the 1990s all Albanians in Kosovo had become potential targets simply because of their ethnicity. Those of them who can be considered as political activists, because they engaged "in some politically significant activity that the state seeks to extinguish" (Zolberg et al., 1989, p.30) were at the same time target and political activists, if we consider both their ethnicity and political engagement. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Kosovar Albanian 'political activists' were people involved in various political activities within political parties, factories, student groups, the press, etc.

Zolberg et al.'s definition of 'victim' as the "persons displaced by societal or international violence that is not necessarily directed to them as individuals but makes life in their own country impossible" (Zolberg et al., 1989, p.30) is relevant in the case of Romas, the third ethnic group living in Kosovo, who were caught between Serbian and Albanian fires. During the Kosovo crisis, the only case when violence was not specifically directed at Kosovar Albanians is the case of NATO's bombing campaign addressed to specific Serbian targets. During the campaign, Kosovar Albanians feared violence from two different fronts: the Serbs pushing them out of their houses and from NATO's mistakes. As such it is difficult to place them within Zolberg et al.'s precise definition of victims, therefore, I focus only on the cases of Targets and Political Activists below.

Target

In Kosovo, stereotypes and racism emerging from nationalist discourses and fomented by various events throughout the 1990s exacerbated the polarisation of the two main ethnic groups, Serbs and Albanians. The net division allowed the identification of each other's enemy on an ethnic basis making Serb and Albanians the respective target of each other's attacks. Given the power differential between the two groups, during many phases of the conflict Albanians in Kosovo were targets of state abuse.

“They hate us, they think we are less than human being. If you were Albanian it was already a good reason for them to kill you. They had no respect for women, children, old people, we were all targets” Petrit (M, 18, s, arr:1999, student)

Various human rights organisations recorded human rights violations against Kosovar Albanians throughout the 1990s. I discuss this in more details later in the chapter.

Political activists

The group of political activists includes people of different educational and family backgrounds, age and social class who were actively opposing Belgrade's government and its policies in Kosovo and who asked for Kosovo's autonomy to be restored and/or for the recognition of its republic status. This group includes members of political parties, members of the parallel Kosovo Albanian government, students, journalists, factory workers, KLA members and supporters, and constituted, therefore, the prime target of persecution.

For example, the category also includes young people who adhered to the non-violent protest organised by the Students Union of the Prishtina University (UPS) on the 1st of October 1997, in which they were asking for the use of the university premises and for education in Albanian language. The students faced the violent repression of their demonstration by the police who arrested and injured many of them.

This was also the case of the miners of the Trepca mines who went on strike in 1989 to protest against the revocation of Kosovo's autonomous status and as a consequence lost their jobs because they were dismissed, arrested or decided to leave their jobs out of solidarity.¹⁰

In a few words, all Kosovo Albanians were potential targets of state persecution in Kosovo during the 1990s. Therefore, some people left Kosovo because their ethnicity alone made them fear violence and persecution, while others left because their political activities put their life particularly in danger. It is important to understand how these differences influenced both the time and the modality of their flight as this determined the time of arrival in exile and the kind of experience refugees had been through before their departure.

5.7.4 The time of departure

All the respondents I interviewed had left the region during the 1990s. Some of them had escaped independently to Western Europe, while others left during NATO's bombing campaign and had escaped first to neighbouring countries before reaching, independently or through the evacuation programme, other countries of exile.

The Kinetic Model of Kunz (1973) is helpful in explaining different movements out of Kosovo and his distinction between 'anticipatory refugee movement' and 'acute refugee movement' is useful in understanding the different ways in which people fled out of Kosovo in relation to their situation and their position within the conflict.

According to Kunz's typology, anticipatory refugee movements involve refugees who leave their home country before the deterioration of the military or political situation. The perceived approaching danger determines the choice to leave and the time available to plan the flight. In this case, Kunz explains, it is not unusual that the personal fear of danger is preceded by gradual economical restrictions thus causing anticipatory flights which are simultaneously dictated by the wish to seek better economic opportunities and escape personal danger.

¹⁰By 1995, there were only 1,200 Albanian workers in the mines, down from 5,100 in 1989.

In the case of acute refugee movements, people flee in mass or in groups, in order to escape the immediate danger brought by a great political change or war and run to safety in a neighbouring country or nearby country willing to grant them asylum. If the situation deteriorates in the first country of exile, further migration to a different country might follow.

In the case of Kosovar refugees, we can distinguish both types: anticipatory refugee movements in Kosovo include a variety of people who left the region at different stages in the 1990s in order to escape for fear of personal danger such as political activists, young people, people who lost their jobs because of the political situation and suspected collaborators of the regime; acute refugee movements include the people who left in the late 1990s exodus of people from Kosovo as a consequence of the escalation of violence, mass expulsions and NATO's bombing campaign. The two cases are explained in more detail next.

5.7.5 Anticipatory refugees

Youth

This group includes young people who left Kosovo when the University of Pristina was closed, to escape persecution and study abroad or look for a job. Behar was studying law in the late 1980s and got involved with the student movement. He managed not to get caught when the police raided the demonstrations, but he was always in great danger. When they closed the university he left immediately since the situation was getting worse and there was nothing he could do if he stayed but endanger his life.

“Alla fine degli anni '80 ero iscritto all'Università di Pristina e studiavo legge. Facevo parte del movimento studentesco ed ho partecipato alle manifestazioni. Quando la polizia è intervenuta ed ha arrestato alcuni di noi sono riuscito a scappare. Sono rimasto, anche se ero sempre in pericolo, fino a quando hanno chiuso l'università. A quel punto ho deciso di andar via, perchè la situazione stava precipitando e per me non c'era altro che pericolo

per la mia vita se restavo.” Behar (M, 30+, m, arr:1991, construction site manager)

Another group of young people, coming mainly from middle class families from Pristina, were already abroad in the early 1990s. They were mainly in the UK, to learn or improve their English language skills or to travel during their gap year. Many of them decided that it was not safe to return to Kosovo considering the news they received from home and became refugees.

“Many of my generation came to London after high school. Almost all my school came here. We wanted to see London and learn English. [...] Then the problem started in Croatia and even in Kosova the situation became worse and worse. I talked to my parents on the phone and they told me that it was better if I did not go back. I did not want to be part of the conflict, neither as a victim nor as an offender. My friend decided to do the same and many others of us remained here.” Ada (F, 30+, s, arr:1991, shop manager)

A further example is that of young males who were conscripted into the Yugoslav army, which after the war in Bosnia and Croatia was *de facto* a Serbian army. Many of them left Kosovo to avoid the military service.

“I escaped to avoid the army. The ones who went, did not come back. The war in other parts of Yugoslavia had started and I did not want to fight in the Serbian army. They arrested people if they didn’t want to go, so I knew that my life was in danger and I had to leave.” Ardian (M, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

People who had lost their jobs

Civil servants, doctors, teachers, professors, journalists, miners and many others lost their jobs because of their ethnicity. Some of them lost their positions for having

protested against the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy status or/and certain policies imposed on them from Belgrade.

Behar explained that the regime closed the schools, fired many workers and stopped paying teachers and other professionals. He said that people were desperate and that if you were Albanian you could not find work any longer.

“Anni '90, chiuse scuole e hanno mandato via tutti quanti gli operai, il regime non pagava più insegnanti o altri professionisti. La gente era disperata. Se eri Albanese, non lavoravi più.” Behar (M, 30+, m, arr:1991, construction site manager)

This reinforces the view that even though some refugees could appear to be economic migrants, they were in fact refugees escaping persecution and discrimination.

Collaborators of the regime

Some people, including civil servants who kept their jobs, interpreters and whoever was suspected of entertaining good relationship with the Serbian community, were considered as collaborators of the Serbian regime. The majority of these people left Kosovo after the KLA started to be operative in Kosovo targeting them. Others remained in Kosovo and left only during the mass expulsion that happened during NATO air bombing campaign.

“I worked for the government as an interpreter for 20 years and I was also employed in the office that worked with political prisoners. I have so many enemies, all the families of political prisoners. I managed to escape danger until 1999 when my family was pushed out of Kosova by Serbian paramilitary soldiers.” Stela(F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

5.7.6 Acute refugees

Between 1998 and 1999, the conflict reached the highest level of violence causing the flight of thousands of Kosovar Albanians. The clashes in 1998 (between April and

September) caused the displacement of between 200,000 and 300,000 people of which about 60,000 fled out of Kosovo (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). The refugee crisis worsened during NATO's intervention, from March to June 1999, with many people driven out of their homes to escape violence or being directly expelled (Morozzo della Rocca, 1999).

Human rights violations had been recorded by several human rights organisations in Kosovo throughout the 1990s. A report of the OSCE-KVM mission describes the situation between October 1998 to 9 June 1999 recording various human rights violations. According to the report:

“The range of themes covered is indicative of how extensive was Kosovo's human rights crisis within the time period of October 1998 to the 9th June 1999, albeit many of the issues covered had been of growing concern for years.” (OSCE, 1999, p.30)

The list of violations includes: violation of the right to life, torture and ill-treatment, rape and other forms of sexual violence, missing persons, arbitrary arrest and detention, violation of the right to a fair trial, other forms of persecution such as intimidation and harassment and denial of access to health care. Moreover, OSCE (1999) recorded deliberate destruction of civilian property, looting and pillage. During NATO's bombing campaign other human rights abuses were recorded such as the use of human shields and other endangering of non-combatants during military operations and forced expulsion. Some of the people I interviewed had been victims of violence and human rights abuses or had escaped after witnessing violence on families, neighbours and friends; many had seen the destruction of their houses and/or their entire villages.

“In March 1999, the Serbians attacked my village with heavy artillery. They came with their tanks and kept shooting for 3 hours. They started burning houses. We all tried to leave immediately our homes and run to the mountains to escape. The day after we went back to check, the village was destroyed, my house was completely destroyed by the fire, there was nothing

no food, no fire, nothing. Only bodies of dead people, especially women and children, they had cut their heads off. It was terrible, horrifying, I cannot think about it. (The interview was stopped for a moment, to give the respondent time to calm down, after a while he agreed to continue.) We couldn't stay there, we had to go, it was terrible and they could come back at anytime." Alban (M, 20+, m, arr:1999, student)

Other people had been expelled; they were thrown out of their houses and ordered to leave the country immediately. This was the case for Stela's family:

"One day, in 1999, the Serbian soldiers came to our area in Prishtina and gave us 5 minutes to leave the country. I had just time to get a warm jacket for my son and hide my gold in my socks. I left with nothing, wearing my slippers because I did not even had time to put my shoes on. We started going towards the border with Macedonia with our neighbours and many other people." Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

People generally fled en masse or in groups, in the attempt to escape the immediate danger brought by the war or were forced out of their houses and expelled by military or paramilitary forces. They ran to safety mainly in Albania and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Some of them proceeded to migrate to a further country of exile.

5.7.7 Modalities of the flight and final destination

The way in which refugees left Kosovo, the issue of whether they chose their destinations and, if they did, why they chose particular countries can offer new elements to the study of their initial encounter with the country of exile and their modes of settlement and, therefore, their attitudes towards return.

Robinson and Segrott (2002) studied the way in which asylum seekers choose their country of destination. Their report highlights three main factors: the prior decision-making of the possible agent, their access to resources and the urgency of their departure

from their country of origin. They explain that acute asylum seekers may have to take the first opportunity offered to them while anticipatory asylum seekers may be able to wait for what they perceive as a better offer. Therefore, the distinction between anticipatory and acute refugee movements is also useful to examine how the respondents took the decision to leave, the way they left, whether they planned the flight and how and why they decided to come to Italy or the UK. According to Robinson and Segrott (2002), another four variables are important in the selection of a destination for an asylum seekers:

1. the most important factor is whether an asylum seeker has family or friends who already live in one of the countries considered; If the asylum seeker does not know anybody abroad or has relatives in more than one possible countries;
2. then, language becomes the next most important factor;
3. in cases where asylum seekers have the choice of several countries where they have relatives and where their chosen language is also spoken, they will choose on the basis of cultural affinity;
4. finally, when all the above factors are taken into account and the choice is still quite wide, decisions are taken on the basis of images and perceptions already held, and usually casually acquired (through film, music, sport and novels).

In the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees these variables were especially important in the case of anticipatory refugees and acute refugees who left Kosovo independently and less relevant in the case of acute refugees who were moved out of their area through the evacuation programme.

5.8 Anticipatory refugee movements

Kunz (1973) observes that anticipatory refugees might have preferences on where to flee, but often other factors, rather than their personal wish, will determine the destination. Generally, Kosovar Albanians belonging to this category had some time to think about

their departure. The general favourite destinations in Europe were Switzerland and Germany, because many of them had families or friends who had migrated earlier to those countries. The respondents I interviewed in Italy and in the UK had very different reasons for having reached the two countries.

5.8.1 Arrivals in Italy

Italy was not the immediate choice for many people at the beginning of the 1990s. Initially, many saw Italy as a country of transition to other destinations, mainly Switzerland and Germany. Some people tried repeatedly to go and settle there, but did not manage and remained in Italy. As a result, a significant number of Kosovar Albanians are settled in certain northern areas of Italy, for example in the region of Lombardia at the border with Switzerland. I conducted some of my interviews in that area and the respondents told me that, initially, they had gone there to try to cross the border. Then they realised that it was not easy and remained there. There was an advantage on being close to the border anyway, a relative proximity to their relatives and friends on the other side of the border. Other people went to Italy to join other friends or families who had already settled there for some time and did not know what to expect. Engjll left Kosovo to go to Switzerland in 1992. He stayed there until 1994, but since he had not managed to regularise his position, he decided to try in Italy and joined some friends of his who could help him.

“Ho lasciato il Kosovo per andare in Svizzera nel 1992, sono stato per un po’ di tempo là fino al 1994, ma non sono riuscito ad avere documenti a posto. Allora sono venuto qua in Italia dove avevo alcuni amici che mi hanno aiutato.” Engjll (M, 50+, m, arr:1994, carpenter)

Saimir, instead, came to Italy directly from Kosovo to join a friend. The only information about Italy he had was about the Mafia, moreover, other friends who had migrated to Switzerland or Germany had told him that many Italians were migrants there as well.

“Un mio amico lavorava qui, allora l’ho raggiunto. Avevo sentito dell’Italia

solo per la Mafia e avevo sentito da parenti e amici che erano andati in Svizzera e Germania che molti Italiani erano anche loro là.” Saimir (M, 30+, m, arr:1991, shepherd)

5.8.2 Arrivals in the UK

According to Robinson and Segrott’s specific study on the UK situation, many of the people that they interviewed came to the UK:

“[...] because they spoke English, because they had some familiarity with English or because they regarded English as a world language, the acquisition of which would increase access to opportunities” (Robinson and Segrott, 2002, p.62)

The case of Kosovar Albanians in the UK seems to confirm these findings. Initially, people came to the UK mainly because of the language. Some people had studied English at school and felt more comfortable about communicating with the locals and, therefore, better equipped to seize more opportunities; others were attracted by the chance to improve their language skills or learn English, which they considered to be a useful language for its international relevance. Joining families and friends was the other main reason for choosing the UK as a destination.

“We wanted to see London and learn English. That is why we came here. Where else could I have gone? Germany? Too racist! Italy or France, I did not know the language at all and I am not interested in learning them either. These are fine to visit, not to live in! Scandinavian countries it is too cold! England is logical, for the language!” Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

5.9 Acute refugee movements

Kunz (1973) highlights that the first need for refugees in acute refugee movements is that of reaching safety. In this case, the aim of most refugees is that of crossing the border to escape the immediate danger and the choice of the destination is dictated by this need. He adds that, in some cases further migration to a third country will be necessary at a later stage, but when passing through the borders few of the refugees are actually aware that this might take place. In Kosovo, those who belong to this category did not have much time to prepare their departure. Many had never considered this possibility before, as they were especially old people, women and children, but were forced to leave as a response to the direct violence that pushed them out of their homes and villages and reached neighbouring countries.

Ermal told the story of his family's escape from their village. On the 25th of March 1999 he had to flee with his grandmother, his mother and two brothers. His father had left earlier to escape persecution. They used to live together and since 1998 they had been worried about Serbian attacks to their village which was inhabited only by Albanians. That day, when his mother woke up to check out the window if the situation was safe, she saw Serbian soldiers on the hill opposite their house. Then she woke them up and while they were looking out of the window they saw one of their neighbours who was going to the centre of the village to warn other people. The man was shot under their eyes and they understood they had to leave. Only three families of the village managed to escape. The Serbians killed 22 family members and 56 other people. His grandfather decided to stay behind to bury the corpses of the first people who had died which were in their garden, but they shot him too. In the turmoil of the attack, they could do nothing but keep fleeing for their lives with nothing, not even shoes on their feet. They followed other people who were going to Albania.

“Il 25 Marzo 1999, io, mia nonna, mia mamma e due fratelli siamo dovuti scappare da casa nostra. Abitavamo tutti insieme. Mio papà era andato via qualche anno prima perchè lo cercavano per ammazzarlo. Dal 1998 eravamo sempre preoccupati di un attacco, il nostro villaggio era abitato solo da Albanesi ed eravamo un target dell'esercito Serbo. Il 25 Marzo, mia madre si era alzata presto. Si alzava presto ogni mattina, per controllare dalla

finestra la situazione. Quel giorno si è accorta che la collina davanti a casa nostra era piena di soldati Serbi. Ci ha svegliati, e siamo andati a controllare alla finestra anche noi, Abbiamo visto un nostro vicino che correva verso il centro del villaggio per avvisare tutti. Lo abbiamo visto cadere a terra, gli hanno sparato dalla collina. Solo tre famiglie siamo riuscite a scappare. Hanno sparato a 22 persone della mia famiglia e 56 altre persone sono morte. Quando siamo scappati, mio nonno è rimasto indietro perchè voleva seppellire i primi tredici che hanno ucciso i cui corpi erano nel nostro giardino, ma non è riuscito perchè hanno sparato anche a lui. Noi non siamo riusciti a fare niente, dovevamo andare. Siamo scappati senza niente, neanche le scarpe e abbiamo seguito gli altri verso l'Albania". Ermal (M, 19, s, arr:1999, student)

People escaped to neighbouring countries, and at a later stage, some of them were either taken to other countries through the evacuation programme or left independently to reach other destinations. The main reasons for this further migration were that of avoiding the harsh conditions of the refugee camps and the growing tension in the first country of exile or reach families and friends abroad.

Everyone I interviewed, who belongs to this group, arrived in Italy or the UK after having reached one of the possible neighbouring countries; some of them managed to leave independently, often with the aim of reaching relatives who already lived there, while others came through the evacuation programme.

"Serbian soldiers came to the village in March 1999. They wanted to know where the UCK people lived, they threatened that if we did not tell them they would rape the women and kill the children. Then, they set fire to the house. They separated the men from the women and children. The young women were raped and the children were terrified. We were separated for 3 days before we saw our husbands again. All the men had been beaten and the village had been completely destroyed. We had to leave, women and children in a trailer and the men on foot, we started going. We went to Albania and stayed in a camp in a tent. There we found an agent who sold

us a trip to safety and after about a month of traveling by bus and plane and train we arrived to England.” Mimoza (F, 40+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

“We reached the border with Macedonia. There we found several Albanian families from Macedonia waiting to help those who were running away from Kosovo like us. We were really lucky because a family decided to help us and they had us in their house for two months. They were too good to us! I will never forget what they did for us! While we were there, we heard about the possibility to apply in Scopje for the evacuation offered by the English government and we applied in the hope to see our children again. (They were in London since the early 1990s). We were accepted and we went to Manchester.” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

In conclusion, anticipatory refugees had generally more time to plan their escape from Kosovo. Although, the majority would have preferred to go to Switzerland or Germany, other factors influenced their flight to other countries. Initially, those who went to Italy had the intention to reach other destinations, but since they did not manage to cross the borders, they stayed; others, chose Italy because they already had some families or friends there who could help them. The UK was mostly chosen for the language opportunities and to join families and friends as well. Overall, acute refugees escaped because of sudden events such as the direct attack to their neighbourhoods, families and houses or because they were expelled. Their flight was not planned, but came as a reaction to events that were out of their control. They run towards neighbouring countries. Some of them remained there, while others migrated further to other countries. The acute refugees, who reached Italy or the UK, did so independently or through the evacuation programme and the main aim was that of reaching friends or relatives.

5.10 Conclusions

This chapter presented an overview of the main historical phases of the Serbian-Albanian relations in Kosovo and the ways in which different crisis produced new migration waves.

It focused on the 1990s events and the escalation of the conflict and examined their impact on the life of the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo. Furthermore, it explored the refugees' position within the conflict and the ways in which this affected the time and the way they left the country. An understanding of this phase of the refugee experience was necessary as it plays a central role in the analysis of the following phases, of settlement and return, that I present in the following chapters. According to the findings of the fieldwork, most refugees believed that the revocation of Kosovo's autonomy, in 1990, marked the beginning of the conflict. Although problems of discrimination and racism had been part of life in Kosovo during the 1970s and 1980s as well, the respondents who could remember those years described them with nostalgia. At that time they enjoyed the benefits afforded by Kosovo's status of autonomous province which allowed them to live a peaceful existence, participate in the administration, send their children to Albanian schools and celebrate their cultural heritage. The main differences in people's accounts of life before 1990 were mostly determined by their social class, education, age, place of residence, etc. Undoubtedly, the conflict brought major changes that influenced both their daily life and their plans for the future. In fact, after the removal of Kosovo's autonomy, human rights were restricted and the economic situation of ethnic Albanians started to worsen as a result of laws adopted by the Republic of Serbia. The judiciary system came under Serbian control and the concept of fair trials was largely abandoned, harsh restrictions were imposed on the media, Albanian schools were closed down and general police harassment of ethnic Albanians increased. As a result, career prospects, students' academic opportunities and other personal plans for the future were disrupted by these events. Moreover, all Kosovar Albanians became potential targets of state persecution. Obviously, the life of those who were politically engaged was particularly in danger, however, the simple fact of being ethnic Albanian made people the target of human rights abuses. I analysed this in more detail referring to Zolberg et al. (1989)'s typology which explains refugees' position in relation to the conflict and distinguished two types of Kosovar Albanian refugees, Targets and Political Activists. This allowed me to explain different patterns of flight with the additional help of Kunz (1973)'s kinetic model. I showed that Political Activists and specific kind of Targets (the youth, journalists, teachers and people dismissed from their jobs because of their ethnicity)

were anticipatory refugees who left Kosovo before the conflict precipitated in 1998-1999. These people, I explained, had specific reasons for leaving the country and had, generally, more time to plan their flight and attempt to reach their favorite destination. Acute refugee movements included Targets, people who were direct subject of violence because of their ethnicity as a result of the increasing level of violence that was brought by the events of the late 1990s. In this case, people left suddenly, with no time to plan their flight and reached neighbouring countries in desperate conditions. Some of them proceeded to re-emigrate to other countries independently or via the evacuation programme.

These differences, I have argued in previous chapters, are most likely to influence the refugees' mode of settlement in the country of exile and, consequently, have also an impact on the decision about return. In the following two chapters on Kosovar Albanians who arrived in the UK or Italy independently (Chapter 6) or through the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (Chapter 7) I deal with the refugees experience in exile and examine the different contexts anticipatory and acute refugees had to confront and the way in which they related to them.

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Chapter 6

Reception and settlement of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK: the case of spontaneous arrivals

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 I argued that four key factors need to be considered when studying refugees' decision-making processes in relation to return: their relationship with the country of origin and the conflict, the experience during the flight, their encounter and interaction with the receiving society and its policies, the conditions in the country of origin after the end of the conflict.

In this chapter and in Chapter 7 I focus on the refugees' experiences in the country of exile, the UK and Italy respectively, beginning with an analysis of the immigration and asylum policies that set up the context within which refugees found themselves at the time of their arrival. As explained in Chapter 4, I distinguish between different groups of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK (more specifically England) and Italy in order to better understand the influence exercised by the conditions in the country of exile on

the decision to return.

This chapter focuses on the case of Kosovar Albanians in the UK. It provides a brief overview of the previous interaction between politics, media, public opinion, NGOs and refugees vis-à-vis immigration and asylum in order to understand the conditions Kosovar Albanian refugees found when they arrived in the UK. This overview is followed by an analysis of the refugees' interaction with these conditions and a study of their collective and individual responses to them. Attention is given to the differences in social class, education, age and gender of the refugees and their different positions within the conflict in the country of origin. While in the previous chapter I distinguished between different types of refugees according to their position in relation to the conflict, the time and the modes of their departure, here I explore the ways in which these differences affected the relationship with the policies and society of the receiving country, and the modes of settlement of anticipatory and acute refugees who arrived spontaneously in the UK.

In the following chapter, I focus on the reception and settlement of Kosovar Albanians who arrived spontaneously in Italy and I compare the experiences of the refugees in the two countries highlighting some of the differences and similarities.

6.1.1 Preliminary

In both Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, I discuss refugees' settlement and integration policies and considering that there are no clear single definitions of these concepts, it is necessary to explain how I use these terms before delving into the analysis.

With respect to "integration", Castles et al. (2003) emphasise that: "There is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated" (Castles et al., 2003). There are two main usages of the term which have different meanings. Integration, they explain, is either used in a normative way, indicating a one-way process of adaptation by newcomers to fit in with a dominant culture and way of life or is conceived as a two-way process of adaptation, which implies changing values, norms and behaviour for both newcomers and members of the existing society (Castles et al., 2003, p.114).

Similarly, there is no single definition of settlement. It is one of the many alternative concepts to integration and it is a relatively general and neutral term indicating once again the process whereby immigrants and refugees become part of society (Castles et al., 2003). Castles et al. (2003) notice that despite the fact that much sociological research on settlement stresses the active role of the immigrants and the ethnic community, in the context of policy models the term is mainly used to define the process in top-down or social engineering terms.

In general, I use the term 'integration' or 'settlement' in Chapter ?? and Chapter ?? to describe the process by which refugees and the structure and culture of the receiving society interact with each other in the country of exile. I follow the definition of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) that considers integration to be a process of change that is:

- “a) dynamic and two-way: it places demands on both receiving societies and the individuals and/or the communities concerned. From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness to adapt public institutions to changes in the population profile, accept refugees as part of the national community, and take action to facilitate access to resources and decision-making processes.
- b) long term: from a psychological perspective, it often starts at the time of arrival in the country of final destination and is concluded when a refugee becomes an active member of that society from a legal, social, economic, educational and cultural perspective.
- c) multi-dimensional: it relates both to the conditions for and actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of durable asylum as well as to refugees' own perception of acceptance by and membership in the host society.” (ECRE, 1999, p.6-7)

Although, ECRE places emphasis on the fact that integration often starts at the time of arrival, in the policy context, both integration and settlement are often referred to

people who already have a status in the country of exile. Smart (2001) recognises that excluding people with no status, such as asylum seekers or illegal migrants, means neglecting their needs and universal human desire to put down roots wherever they are and independently of how short the stay. In this chapter, and in the following one, I use the terms settlement/integration interchangeably and analyse refugees' settlement/integration process independently of their legal position in the country of exile.

6.2 Migration and Asylum Policies in the UK

This chapter deals with migration and asylum policies in the UK beginning with a brief general historical overview before placing emphasis on the 1990s which directly affected Kosovar Albanian refugees.

Migration has been part of British history for a long time, with Britain being both a country of emigration and immigration (Morgado, 1989; Miles and Cleary, 1993; Cohen, 1994; Bade, 2003). Since the beginning of the nineteenth century emigration from Britain has been larger than immigration (Wahlbeck, 1999; Foot, 1999), however, it is the latter that has increasingly come to dominate public discourse since the end of the nineteenth century, especially after the Second World War (Morgado, 1989; Foot, 1999).

The debate on immigration of the 1950s is particularly relevant to the study of current immigration and asylum policies in Britain because it defines the general British approach to immigration issues. At that time, immigration was a response to the labour shortages following the war and Britain received new waves of immigrants from the New Commonwealth (the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent) while continuing to attract others from the Old Commonwealth, the Irish Republic and Europe (Zetter et al., 2002). The debate focused mainly on the issues related to Black immigration to Britain and led to the adoption of specific measures that discouraged and restricted admission (Carter et al., 1987). On the one hand, it was believed that new 'coloured' entrants could be assimilated into British society considering that according to the 1948 British Nationality Act all New Commonwealth immigrants were indistinctly given British citizenship. On the other hand, in practice, their presence was regarded with apprehension

and their 'colour' was held to signify 'racial' features that made it impossible for them to be assimilated in British society (Carter, 2000). Increasing social tensions demanded political action and the interpretation of immigration as a problem of numbers in relation to potential cultural and racial dilution (Zetter et al., 2002). This led to the development of a racist and restrictive tradition in immigration control (Platt, 1991) based on two contrasting ideas: on the one hand, the growing numbers of Black citizens represented a threat for society as a source of social problems on the ground of racial differences and their access to the country needed to be controlled and restricted; on the other hand, it was necessary to promote the 'integration' in the wider society of those who were already in the country under the umbrella of multiculturalism which promotes diversity and tolerance within an equal opportunity framework (Solomos, 1989). According to the multicultural discourse in Britain, different cultures can coexist within the same society. People belong to distinct communities which are culturally defined and have clear boundaries (Anthias and Yuval-Davies, 1992)) but at the same time they are equal to each others in the public domain. Zetter et al. emphasise the relevance of these issues in the study of refugees in Britain remarking that:

"[...] public discourse on immigration in the UK continues to focus on the question of race and race relations. Immigration has become synonymous with race relations, a factor which helps explain the generally restrictive government response to increasing numbers of asylum seekers entering the UK from the middle of the 1980s onwards, many of whom were from non-white 'third world' countries (Miles and Cleary, 1993; Cohen, 1994; Schuster and Solomos, 1999; Griffith and Chan-Kam, 2002)." (Zetter et al., 2002, p.42)

The following section explores in more detail the development of asylum policies in the UK, the reaction of the media and public opinion to asylum seekers and refugees and the response of refugees and refugee organisations.

6.2.1 Asylum policies in the UK: 1990s

Britain has a long-standing tradition of hosting refugees that goes back to the seventeenth century, with the case of the French Huguenots and for centuries the country offered a right to asylum to refugees without actually having an explicit asylum law (Foot, 1999). According to Bade (2003), because of this lack of policy, Britain was actually the most consistent and important asylum-granting country in the nineteenth century. The first attempts to control refugee influx coincided with the arrival of Jews from Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century (Foot, 1999; Wahlbeck, 1999). However, until the 1980s, Britain was still one of the most open countries within Europe in respect to the right of asylum. In fact, it was among the initial signatory countries to the UN Refugee Convention in 1951 and ratified the 1967 Protocol in 1968 (United Nations, 1995).

It was only in the 1990s, the timeframe that concerns specifically the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees, that the government started adopting restrictive measures in order to control the number of refugees as a response to the general increase in the number of asylum claimants. In fact, throughout the 1980s, the UK had received a low number of refugees compared to the majority of other Western European countries (Cohen and Joly, 1989). However, at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s the numbers had increased notably. This was mostly a reflection of the general worldwide increase in the number of refugees due to the raising instability in many regions of the world and to the specific large-scale movement of refugees caused by the break-up of Yugoslavia within Europe. As a matter of fact, until the 1990s, asylum seekers and refugees were considered as a particular group of immigrants which was kept outside of the general immigration debate. Ironically, at a time when general immigration issues were losing a central role in the political and public debate, mostly because the doors to immigration had been closed since the mid-seventies (Joly, 1996), issues related to the right to asylum moved high up in the political agenda. Consequently, the public and media hostility that usually, in the past, had characterised responses to newly-arrived immigrant communities started to be directed towards asylum seekers and refugees (Zetter and Pearl, 2000). Moreover, the increase in numbers put a strain on the traditional individual determi-

nation procedures presenting a challenge to the domestic legal systems designed for the protection of refugees which were neither prepared nor equipped to deal with it (Billings, 2001). The government response was to explain the increase of applications by asserting that this was due to economic migrants abusing the system; it was generally concluded that tighter immigration control was needed in relation to asylum. Consequently, the historical proud heritage of Britain as a home for those fleeing persecution and torture emphasising an inclusive and open vision of modern Britain (Wills, 2002) now needed to be reconciled with these new perceptions of asylum seekers/refugees as a threat to community stability and good race relations. Therefore, mirroring the post-war debate on immigration of the 1950s, over the past fifteen years the debate on asylum has developed around two different arguments: on the one hand, deterring people from coming and claiming asylum is considered a necessity while, on the other hand, refugees who are already in Britain are expected to adapt and fit in the larger society (Griffith and Chan-Kam, 2002). This kind of political approach to asylum, the negative media representation of asylum seekers/refugees and people's perception of them as a threat to national identity and stability have contributed to turning asylum seekers/refugees into one of the least popular groups in British society (Griffith and Chan-Kam, 2002).

At the political level, over the past decade, the difference between the approach of the Labour and Conservative parties to the issue has shrank and this is evident in the use of a common political language which talks about 'swamping', 'floods', 'torrents' of asylum seekers coming into Britain and describes the need to be tough on 'bogus' refugees and fair with 'genuine' refugees. Overall, the strategy of the Labour government is based on the idea that it is necessary to be tough on immigration and asylum in order to deny the British National Party and other extreme right movements the possibility to step into the breach with more extreme rhetoric (D'Ancona, 2002). According to the Home Secretary Blunkett (2002):

"Unless properly managed, (however), migration can be perceived as a threat to community stability and good race relations. Where asylum is used as a route to economic migration, it can cause deep resentment in the host community. Democratic governments need to ensure that their electorates have

confidence and trust in the nationality, immigration and asylum systems they are operating, or else people will turn to extremists for answers.” (Blunkett, 2002, p.65)

Throughout the 1990s, the government adopted different strategies in order to keep the figures in relation to asylum as low as possible; Billings (2001) distinguishes between two different kinds of strategies: external and internal ones.

He lists various measures:

“The external strategies employed are: the imposition of visa requirements from people from countries likely to produce refugees; the burden of financial penalties for carriers who accept passengers without the correct travel documentation; the concept of ‘safe third country’; the use of international zones at ports of entry; and interdiction of asylum seekers at sea. Internal strategies are: the use of expedited asylum status determination procedures and truncated means of appeal; restrictions on, or denial of, basic means of subsistence, health care and education; and the use of detention.” (Billings, 2001, p.5)

In the media, despite the fact that general reporting of race-related issues has shown signs of improvement over the last decade, the negative reporting has shifted from minorities to asylum seekers (Mollard, 2001). A study by Oxfam indicates that, through unbalanced reporting, the British press continues to spread a whole series of myths, including perceptions of Britain as being a ‘soft touch’ and of ‘refugees swamping’ the country. For example, in a recent poll conducted by MORI, when asked what percentage of the world’s refugees are in the UK, respondents estimated an average of 23% while the real figure is actually 1.9% (MORI, 2002).

Similarly, since the early 1990s, the public debate on asylum has increasingly focused on the widespread opinion that refugees and asylum seekers represent a threat to society. Griffith and Chan-Kam (2002) emphasise the fact that public negative perceptions of refugees have never been worse and Britain has become one of the most refugee-phobic

countries in the EU. The public rhetoric behind people's protests against the opening of new centres to host asylum seekers shows the use of stereotypes and a 'new' racism that justify widespread general fear. For example, in 2003, the Home Office's plan to use the former military airbase Daedalus in Lee-on-the-Solent, Hampshire, to host between 400 and 500 asylum seekers met the fierce opposition of the local community that created the Daedalus Action Group which used the slogan 'Realist not Racist'. Gosport Borough Council voted unanimously to contribute £5,000 towards the action group campaigning against the proposed centre and councillors in Fareham agreed to contribute another £5,000. The group organised public gatherings, demonstrations, and presented a petition to the Home Office against the plan which was dropped.

The Daedalus Action Group's website explains what the community fears listing:

"Increased crime, personal safety issues, terrorism links, proximity to naval bases and other high risk installations, overtaking health and other resources, reduction in property prices, increased insurance costs." (Daedalus Action Group, 2004)

Resistance to this kind of criminalisation of asylum seekers and refugees has mostly come from the NGO sector and from Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs). For asylum seekers it is difficult to mobilise as a group since they do not have a common language or country of origin, they lack resources and their status impedes organisation (Webber, 1995). Some of them, especially those kept in detention centres or fearing deportation, have tried to protest using hunger strikes and other peaceful form of protest such as the case of an Iranian refugee who stitched up his eyelids, lips and ears in protest at the threat of deportation. In a few extreme cases small groups have reacted with rooftop protests (like in Campsfield detention centre in 1994).

Overall, organisations such as the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, Amnesty International, Oxfam and RCOs have been the main promoters of different views on asylum and the 1990s have seen the creation of new organisations which aim to combat the widespread racism and intolerance. To name a few: the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns formed in 1995 to campaign against deportation of asylum

seekers, the Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass Media Project created in 1999 with the aim of improving the quality and accuracy of media coverage, Barbed Wire Britain campaigning to end migrant and refugee detention, and many others.

In conclusion, since the early 1990s the issue of asylum has become increasingly problematised in the UK. At the political level, this has implied a series of political reforms of the asylum system with the aim of reducing access to asylum procedures and diminish support for asylum seekers and refugees. In the public debate negative media reporting and people fears and intolerance have made asylum seekers and refugees the new recipients of racism and discrimination. Considering that the refugee influx from Kosovo started in the early 1990s, reached its peak in 1999 and continued even in the early 2000s, it is not surprising that different waves of Kosovars coming to Britain faced progressively tougher conditions as the public debate and political response developed, which consequently means that they were faced with different problems depending on their time of arrival.

Having discussed the general developments of asylum policies and the public discourse on asylum in the UK during the 1990s, in the next section the attention is turned to the specific conditions encountered by Kosovar refugees, beginning with a general overview of the main changes in the asylum systems that affected their settlement.

6.3 The case of spontaneous arrivals in the UK

Kosovar Albanians started arriving spontaneously in the UK in the early 1990s; after the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy by the Serbian regime in 1989/90 gave start to a decade of conflict. The inflow from Kosovo continued throughout the decade with numbers increasing from 1997 until 1999 reflecting the intensification of the crisis.

The first ones to arrive were mostly young people coming mainly from urban areas while the majority of those who came at a later stage and during NATO's bombing campaign were from rural areas. People from Kosovo kept coming even after the 1999 war and between January 2001 and December 2002 over 5,000 applications from the FRY were largely from Kosovars (Smart, 2004).

It is difficult to estimate the size of the Kosovar Albanian population in the UK, since any relevant statistics relate to the entire Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with no separate subcategories for Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro (Guild, 2000; Smart, 2001). Smart (2004) claims that at the height of the crisis in Kosovo there could have been up to 20,000 Kosovars in the UK and assesses that currently (2004) there are between 8,000 and 10,000 people; it is also estimated that 80% of them are based in the Greater London area (Smart, 2001) and that 65% of the population are men.

The spontaneous arrivals from Kosovo included both anticipatory refugees that had left Kosovo to escape the persecution of the Serbian authorities (this includes those who were politically engaged or wanted to avoid being conscripted into the Serbian army to fight in Bosnia or had been sacked from public jobs for their ethnicity) and acute refugee movements of people who escaped the direct danger brought to their doorsteps by the conflict.

Their life in the UK was influenced by two main pieces of legislation: the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act and the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. These acts set up different conditions for asylum seekers in the UK and, therefore, in the account of Kosovar Albanians' experiences, I often distinguish between the people who arrived before 1996, from those who came between 1996 and 1999, and those who arrived after the system introduced by the 1999 Act began to operate.

Those who came in the early 1990s were among the first Albanians to arrive in the United Kingdom and settled mainly in the Greater London area gradually forming the Kosovar Albanian community in the country (Kostovicova and Prestreshi, 2003). They were young when they arrived and are currently in their late 20s and 30s. They came in small numbers mostly by their own means. Among the very first Kosovo Albanians in the UK is a group of young people who had just finished school or university before leaving Kosovo and arrived on student visas to study English in London between 1990 and 1991. This is the only group of people who became refugees while already in the UK. The other people arrived from Kosovo to escape persecution and the numbers of arrivals increased especially after 1996-1997 and reached the maximum height in 1999.

Until 1992, Kosovars could arrive on student or tourist visas; however, after the war broke

out in Bosnia in 1992, the UK introduced mandatory visa requirements on nationals of the FRY which included Kosovars. This meant that anyone in Kosovo had to travel to Belgrade to apply for a visa at the British consulate if they wanted to come to the UK. This, obviously, presented people with several problems and as a result Guild (2000) explains that few Bosnian or Kosovar refugees arrived after that date with a visa issued in Belgrade, but found different ways to reach the UK, some irregularly and on false documents.

This indicates that the new wave of restrictive measures vis-à-vis asylum seekers had already started and was aimed especially at deterring people from reaching the UK. In fact, in 1993, the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act introduced further measures to deter people from coming to claim asylum in the UK such as: increased penalties for carriers, fingerprinting for the registration of claims, the right to return asylum seekers to a safe third country and the possibility to hold asylum seekers in detention. The act also introduced 'fast-track' procedures for assessing applications, restricted housing rights and while ensuring that asylum seekers had the right to appeal negative decisions on their applications, it imposed strict time limits (Smart, 2001; Zetter et al., 2002; Refugee Council, 2004).

Guild (2000) explains that detention in prisons or special closed camps, in particular, was used by the administration as a means of deterring people from coming to the UK and the government had defended its use in respect of the Bosnian crisis saying that it was a necessary measure to keep numbers down. In the case of refugees from Kosovo detention as purely a means to deter was not used. However, in several cases asylum seekers were detained on the grounds that they travelled to the country on false documents, since mandatory visa requirements to enter the UK were in place. Despite the fact that the authorities knew that ethnic Albanians from Kosovo could not easily obtain documents before coming or that they had them confiscated by the Serbian forces before being expelled, asylum seekers were detained in the UK because they had insufficient documents to prove they originated from Kosovo and were suspected to be Albanians immigrants who wanted instead to abuse the system (Guild, 2000).

On average, people who claimed asylum before 1996 had to wait between four and six

years before getting a verdict on their applications. However, because of the system in place at the time, they had access to social benefits and support while waiting. As a matter of fact, in the early 1990s, asylum claimants waiting for a decision on their applications were entitled to a certain range of support which included 90% income support payments, child benefit, disability benefit, council tax benefit and housing benefit. They also received assistance with housing, legal aid in relation to their asylum claim, free healthcare, school placement for their children and higher education, and six months after submitting their claim they could apply for the right to work (Smart, 2001). Once granted refugee status or ELR, they were entitled to the normal benefit rate.

The situation was different for those who arrived after 1996, because the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act introduced stronger deterrence measures such as the removal of all rights to social benefits for people claiming asylum in-country or for those on appeal. Moreover, following changes in the 1996 Housing Act, access to public social housing was reduced and resulted in more destitution for asylum seekers and more pressures for social services departments because under the 1948 National Assistance Act they were legally responsible to house them (Zetter et al., 2002). However, following legal action from refugee organisations, assistance had to be reintroduced and the result was that local governments were then made responsible for supporting asylum seekers (Smart, 2001).

Consequently, those Kosovar Albanians who arrived after 1996 faced harsher conditions which depended mostly on the standard of support offered by each single local authority with serious consequences for their well being and their integration process. The waiting time for an asylum decision had been shortened, but on average they still waited between one and four years while living on minimum support.

However, the situation became even worse for those who started arriving in 1999 as a consequence of new stricter legislation. In 1998, the new Labour government, which had been elected in May 1997, issued a White Paper entitled *Fairer, Faster and Firmer* with which it presented the new proposals to change the legislation on asylum. With the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, financial responsibility to support asylum seekers went back to central government that set up a national system of vouchers. The support for

each asylum seeker was reduced to 70% of the general income support benefits, meaning that each eligible asylum seeker would receive £36.54 per week, of which only £10 would be in cash. Moreover, with this Act, the government created the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) which had the goal of assessing asylum seekers eligibility for support, arranging for their accommodation and providing grants to voluntary organisations or reception assistants, which are organisations that help people to complete the application forms to request support and provide initial emergency accommodation for seven days, while NASS examines the claims. In addition to this, the Act established that asylum seekers with no accommodation were to be dispersed around the country and away from London and the seaports. After a positive decision on their claims, refugees would have 14 days to be moved to mainstream services, but in practice this took much longer.

Needless to say the people arriving from Kosovo in 1999, were mostly part of acute refugee movements escaping from the direct consequences of the war or expelled by Serbian forces out of their country. They were a particularly vulnerable group as many had been victims of violence or had been suddenly expelled from their homes, but they also arrived at a moment when they had to face tougher conditions in the UK.

In the following section I analyse the experience of Kosovar Albanian refugees in relation to: legal status, support received upon arrival, housing conditions, English language fluency, legal advice, health, education, employment, gender relations, social life and community organisations. Where relevant I distinguish between three groups: those who arrived before 1996; those who arrived between 1996 and 1999; and those who arrived during and after 1999.

6.3.1 Status

During the late 1980s the number of people who were granted full refugee status according to the Geneva Convention of 1951 had already begun to decrease, while the number of people who received Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) increased.

There are significant differences between the entitlements granted by these two cat-

egories. Refugees with convention status are entitled to the same social benefits as British citizens, to grants and home fees for their studies, and have the right to family reunion as well as economic activities rights and travel documents. Moreover, after five years they can apply for British citizenship.

ELR is granted in those cases in which the authorities are not satisfied that the asylum claimants are in genuine fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion under the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention but recognise that claimants could not be sent back on humanitarian grounds. It is granted for a specific period of time, after which the refugee can apply for an extension or for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). People with ELR are entitled to social assistance benefits, but are not entitled to family reunion, they have to pay home student fees for further and higher education but have to have been living in the UK for three years before they qualify for student support (loans and grants).

During the 1990s, as a result of new restrictive policies, even the number of persons receiving ELR began to decrease and more negative decisions were taken about asylum claims in general (Wahlbeck, 1999). Those Kosovar Albanians who were able to prove a personal well founded fear of persecution in Kosovo were likely to be granted refugee status or ELR for one year that could be extended upon request. However, a decision of the immigration appeal tribunal in 1996 on the case of Mr. Gashi and Mr. Nikshiqi, Kosovar Albanians who had been refused asylum, established that Mr. Gashi and his co-appellant were refugees on the sole ground of their race and the history of persecution of their race in Kosovo. With this decision, the UK courts imposed on the administration to recognise all Kosovar Albanians claiming asylum as refugees (Guild, 2000).

Guild (2000) explains that it is not clear from the statistics to what extent the administration actually followed the court's judgement on Kosovars. Nevertheless, she notices that "until about mid-May 1999 it seemed that applicants were being recognised as refugees on a rather random but individual basis". Many cases remained undecided for years becoming part of the backlog of cases to be decided by the Home Office (Smart, 2004). During the war in 1999, there was a rush of recognitions of Kosovars as refugees which was followed by a complete stop in July 1999, after which some Kosovars were

granted one year ELR. On the 13 of September 1999, the Home Secretary Jack Straw announced that no ELR would be granted 'automatically' to Kosovars any longer (Guild, 2000). Of those who did not return at the end of the war and had applied for an extension of their ELR, some had it granted while others had it refused. Asylum seekers who arrived thereafter were more likely to receive a negative decision on their claim, unless there were specific individual circumstances.

At the time of the interviews, the refugees who had arrived from Kosovo before 1996 had received refugee status, ELR or ILR and some of them had been granted citizenship; some of the respondents who had arrived between 1996 and 2000 were still waiting for their asylum decision; some were waiting to hear from their appeal and others were fighting against deportation orders.

6.3.2 Support upon arrival and Benefits

As already mentioned, a group of young people were already in London when the tensions began in Kosovo and understood that going back was not safe. Initially, they started supporting themselves doing small jobs in London. In some cases they had to wait over a year before hearing that they could claim asylum and seek help.

"A friend of mine found a job as a waitress and supported both of us with her money, in the meantime I was looking for a job and after two months I found a job in a restaurant as a waitress as well. I was very shy and also ashamed of this job. A few months earlier I wanted to study to become a lawyer and I was even fighting with my father who preferred that I studied architecture because he said that there was no place for lawyers in Kosovo under the regime. Now, here I was a waitress with no future. Then another friend mentioned to us that we could apply for asylum and explained what to do." Besa (F,30+, m, arr:1991, lawyer)

Deciding to claim asylum was not easy as this involved a clear realisation that it was not possible to go home anytime soon and that they would not see their families for a long time.

“It took me months to decide to apply for asylum, you know. I knew that if I did, I was not going to see my parents for a long time. Then, following what was going on in Kosovo and talking to my parents over the phone, I realised that it was the only option. I also understood that I would have had more rights here and more prospects”. Ada (F, 30+, s, arr:1991, shop manager)

These doubts about filing a claim were also coupled with the fact that many of them were experiencing life abroad and away from their families for the first time and that talking to immigration officers reminded them of the regime back home, therefore, the procedure was not an easy emotional experience. As one of them explained:

“The immigration officer terrified me, I grew up with the feeling that authority is evil.” Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

Some of them were friends before coming to the UK and tried to give each other moral and practical support. In general, people who arrived before 1996 waited up to six years to hear about the decision on their asylum claims, however, those who needed help had the full support of the pre-1996 asylum system. Obviously, as Smart (2001) remarks, living on benefits was not easy and meant hardship, but it helped people with their basic needs while trying to establish a new life in the UK. This support meant that they had time to improve their language skills, build some networks with other Kosovar Albanians or British people and look for employment. None of the people I interviewed who arrived in this time frame were claiming benefit at the time of the interviews.

The people who arrived between 1996 and 1999, faced the consequences of the new 1996 Immigration Act and were supported by local authorities which had a responsibility to make sure that they were not destitute. This implied the adoption of different support systems that led to a variety of conditions. In some cities the situation was better than others, but overall the approach was that of guaranteeing the minimum possible standards. In some cases local authorities had contracted hotels and B&Bs to provide asylum seekers with accommodation and meals, and did not provide any other form of support.

In other instances a voucher system was introduced and asylum seekers were allowed to use the vouchers only in specific shops, which often were not the cheapest or the most convenient ones. In certain cases, some items were excluded from the range of products they could purchase. In this confusing environment, it was extremely hard even for NGOs and RCOs to provide advice to people and it was difficult for them to understand what they were and were not entitled to.

“When I arrived a friend of mine who was already here helped me and supported me. He talked to the Refugee Legal Centre and they decided to help me with the application. I stayed with my friend for two months, until the Refugee Council found me a place where I had a small room and I shared kitchen, bathroom and a toilet. The common spaces were really dirty and disgusting, but nobody seemed to care. I wanted to look for a job immediately, but they explained that I could not work for the first six months, the council paid for the accommodation and arranged for my meals, but I had no money at all. I couldn’t even pay for the bus or make a phone call.”

Rezar (M, 40+, s, arr:1997, mechanic)

Many of them were still living on benefits at the time of the interviews as the uncertainty of their status together with other factors that I analyse in the section about employment, had made it difficult for them to find a job and become self sufficient.

The new 1999 Act, was introduced gradually and this meant that for a certain time the old and new systems overlapped, with some asylum seekers still under the responsibility of local authorities and others already handled by NASS. The main changes introduced by the Act were dispersal and the voucher scheme. Dispersal in the territory implied that people in need of assistance were spread away from London and the South-East, which were the areas of the country with the largest refugee population, to destinations decided by NASS. This often cut people out from the rest of the community and created a sense of isolation.

“When they told me that they were sending me outside of London I felt lost, I had some friends here and they were the only link I had with Kosovo here.

I wanted to refuse to go, but then I understood that if I did, they would cut my benefits and I could not accept to stay with my friends and be maintained by them.” Zenel (M, 40+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

Generally, the voucher system has been severely criticised because of the difficulties and the different problems asylum seekers faced as a consequence of this scheme. A report of the Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office, surveyed over 200 asylum seekers using vouchers to understand the main problems they faced (Eagle et al., 2002). Some of the problems they found are reflected in the experiences of the interviewees I talked to:

1. Often very long distances had to be traveled to collect the vouchers or to come and go from shops which were part of the scheme;

“I am alone here with my four children and the shops are really far, it is hard for me to take my children with me to the shops or to leave them with someone, but I cannot pay for the bus, I do not have enough money to pay for all of us on the bus.” Juliana (F, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

2. Some shops refused vouchers for various reasons and often shop staff did not know what could be purchased with vouchers and restricted choices about what to buy;

“They told me that yogurt is a luxury and I cannot buy it. For us yogurt is normal, is no luxury. Fruit also no, cigarettes no, a telephone card also.” Jetmir (M, 40+, m, arr:1995, unemployed)

3. Overall, shops that accept vouchers were more expensive than other shops not participating in the scheme;

“I have seen shops around here much cheaper. But they say I need money no vouchers to buy there.” Juliana (F, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

4. Finally, many asylum seekers felt embarrassed when collecting their vouchers or if they had difficulties adding up the costs of their shopping and understanding which vouchers to use.

“You go to buy bread and eggs and you need a calculator with you, it is so embarrassing! People look, why he does not pay with money? What are these tickets and I feel bad. They think you are a bad person because you are an asylum seeker and you cannot have money. I was a teacher in Kosovo, people respected me, now I have to be considered like a homeless person.” Jetmir (M, 40+, m, arr:1995, unemployed)

In few words, the different support systems had a major impact on the refugees’ integration process defining their spheres of action. The progressively tougher and stricter provisions made it increasingly harder for Kosovar Albanians to improve their conditions and affected all aspects of their life in the UK.

6.3.3 Housing

Having or not having a ‘proper house’ was indicated by the respondents as an element of stability or instability for their life in the UK.

“Now I feel settled here. I have a proper house that belongs to me, I have a place I can really call home.” Besa (F, 30+, m, arr:1991, lawyer)

The first group of people who arrived in the UK in the early 1990s had initially stayed with British families as *au pair* or in shared accommodation with other youngsters. After claiming asylum, those who were on benefits were allocated accommodation while others who had found a job kept sharing with other people. This group received and helped newcomers throughout the decade, often providing people with an initial place to stay. In general, those who arrived before 1996, had often stayed in B&Bs provided by social services departments and moved into independent accommodation after getting refugee status or ELR. At the time of the interviews the majority of them had a stable status and a good job that allowed them to rent or buy their own property.

“I have moved so many times in the past 10 years. I am so glad to have a house now. No one can tell me to get out or what to do. I am finally settled.” Vitore (M, 30+, s, arr:1991, IT consultant)

After 1996, most asylum seekers had been given temporary accommodation by social services which were often overcrowded and in bad conditions. The interviewees explained that it was even hard to get some help to repair the place or try to improve it.

“No one cared about the conditions we lived in, the bathroom was disgusting, you know all these people sharing! The house was falling apart. I had lots of free time and I wanted to do some work on the flat, but I could not afford the material to do it. I asked them if they (social services) could help, but they said no.” Mitat (M, 40+, s, arr:1998, unemployed)

After 1999, dispersal policies spread people around the country, the problems with the standard of the accommodations remained high and the situation worsened with the distance from key refugee service providers and other members of the community. The main areas that received Kosovar Albanians under NASS were the Midlands, the North of England and the Greater Manchester area. Smart (2004) notes that NASS had started to list people from Kosovo as a distinct group and was able to provide data for 2003 when they provided accommodation for a total of 764 Kosovars of which 155 in Greater London, 82 in the East Midlands, 90 in the North East, 113 in the North West, 194 in Yorkshire and Humberside and 130 in Scotland.

Moreover, the lack of cash imposed by the new voucher system made it more difficult to keep in touch with various services and with other Kosovar Albanians in the UK because of the high cost of travelling and phone calls.

6.3.4 English language

Language skills have proved to be a great concern for all the interviewees because at some point they have all experienced the frustration of not being able to understand

and communicate and have experienced the consequences of this. Many of those who came before 1996 spoke some English before arriving; this helped them immediately with finding the necessary support, getting a job or study. Those who spoke no English when they arrived felt powerless and confused, speaking the language made people feel more in control and independent.

“Before the war I was very active and independent. I was the point of reference for all my extended family in Pristina. Talking the language gives me back a bit of independence, so I do not have to stress my children too much with my problems.” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

The inability to speak created communication problems with lawyers, some service providers, doctors, attempts to find a job and restricted socialisation to just other Albanian-speaking people.

The ability to learn English was influenced by the personal predisposition to learn foreign languages, by the level of education, age, personal motivation and the level of support and socialisation with English speakers. In general, those refugees who already spoke other languages or had a higher level of education found it easier to learn English, so did young people, while the older generation struggled. Pupils in school did extremely well and they often interpreted for their parents in everyday life situations.

Obviously, the length of stay in the UK also had an impact on people’s fluency, the longer they had been here, the better their English. Moreover, the time of arrival also determined the level of external support people received. In general, few of those who arrived spontaneously had the chance to attend English classes for adults. The ones who lived in London had more opportunities to attend these courses. For example the College of North East London, which is the London area with the highest presence of refugees and asylum seekers, has organised special classes to teach English to speakers of other languages which are mostly attended by refugees¹, of which in the late 1990s many from Kosovo.

¹Asylum seekers with ELR who have been in the UK for more the three years and refugees with full convention status do not have to pay for tuition, registration or exam fees.

However, those who did not attend classes used different systems to learn, from ‘teach yourself’ text books, following the homework of their children and watching television with the support of teletext’s subtitles.

“I cannot go to school at my age! I have to take care of my son. He comes first. I am happy, he is good with the language. I am studying at home, I have those books and I use the subtitles on the TV. This helps a lot, to understand, because for me they talk so fast! In Kosovo I was an interpreter, I speak other languages and I am used to studying alone.” Flora (F, 40+, m, arr:1998, unemployed)

6.3.5 Legal Advice

Receiving good legal advice was always important for the success of an asylum claim or an appeal. However, over the decade, it became progressively more vital as the assessment of each case became stricter on the part of the authority. Moreover, most lawyers where in London and the 1999 dispersal policies complicated the situation even further. Asylum seekers placed away from the London area, had difficulties accessing good expert lawyers in other areas of the country.

The consequences of bad legal advice were enormous and caused many Kosovar Albanians to have their claims refused and risk deportation.

“The solicitor told us to give only the simple facts to the court at the beginning, when they asked me questions I answered and I said more things. Because I said more when they asked, they said that at the beginning I was not saying the truth and they refused the appeal.” Azim (M, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

6.3.6 Health

People were happy with the healthcare they received in the UK. Some people received proper care for the first time in this country, because in Kosovo they did not trust the

Serb-dominated health facilities. They explained that it was not safe and said that children had been poisoned by Serbian doctors or Albanian babies killed during the delivery. Although these assertions cannot be proved, it has been documented that during NATO's air campaign there was widespread violation of medical neutrality by Serbian forces against Kosovar Albanians (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).

According to the time of their flight and the situation they had escaped from in Kosovo, some of them had injuries as a result of conflict while others were mostly psychologically traumatised. According to the Independent International Commission on Kosovo (2000), it was common practice for Serbian forces to beat up ethnic Albanians during interrogations or before expelling them. Administering electric shocks and other forms of painful and humiliating torture was a matter of routine. The commission also found that rape and sexual assaults that took place during the air war in 1999 were merely a continuation of a trend begun by Serb forces a decade earlier.

However, by the time of the interviews Kosovar Albanians who had arrived before 1996/1997 had resolved their physical problems. Those who were still with an uncertain status at the time of the interviews were anxious about being able to complete their treatment before having to return. Getting access to GPs was relatively easy; however, for those who could not speak English the difficulties to explain their problems caused distress, frustration and delays.

Psychological support was more difficult to obtain, many interviewees were or had been suffering with anxiety, depression and post-traumatic disorders. Some people did not know they could get help for psychological distress and in some cases it was their GP who pointed out that they might be depressed and explained that they could get help.

“My GP told me that I had depression. I was really low and unable to cope. Now I am going to counselling and it is helping a lot to understand what to do with my life, how to open a new chapter and leave all my problems in the past.” Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

There were different reasons that caused anxiety or depression. Those who arrived

before NATO's air campaign were worried about the situation in Kosovo. The difficulty of getting news from their relatives and friends, and the news about the abuses and the killings made them constantly anxious and stressed.

“The first month of the war I managed to get news from my parents, for the following two months it was impossible to get in touch. I could not sleep at night, I was always following the news to understand which areas had been affected. I was devastated when I heard news of massacres and rapes. I calmed down only when I finally managed to talk to them again.” Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

Those who had been victims of violence or had witnessed human rights abuses suffered post-traumatic disorders. For example, one of the interviewees had been detained and raped by Serbian forces in 1995, had seen his sister raped and killed and his parents murdered. He suffered from depression, anxiety and panic attacks and had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress and psychotic depression.

A further cause of anxiety was the wait for the asylum decision, the uncertainty about their future and the fear of deportation which added further stress.

6.3.7 Education

Under the Milosevic's regime Albanians were expelled from the official university and school system and were denied education for a decade. As we have already mentioned many of the refugees who arrived in the UK before the escalation of the conflict in 1998-1999 were either students or people who had recently terminated their studies and who regarded education as an essential part of their life. For many of them the reason for leaving Kosovo was directly linked to their involvement in student movements and protest, therefore, the opportunity to study while in exile was highly valued. However, for many years this opportunity was denied to them even in the UK. As a matter of fact, asylum seekers can access university and further educational colleges, but they are not eligible for student loans and have to pay prohibitive overseas fees. Needless to say

that until they received refugee status, ILR, or after three years passed from the time they were granted ELR, which finally entitled them to pay home fees and gave them access to student loans, studying in the UK was not an option for the vast majority of Kosovar Albanian refugees.

Therefore, many of them had to abandon their studies or stop them for a few years until they were granted a status that allowed them to go back to education. Considering that the asylum determination procedure of the early 1990s took up to six/seven years for a decision, it is not until 1996-97 that we can see the return of Kosovar Albanian refugees to higher education or vocational courses. Another impediment on the road to higher education was the need to earn enough money to support their life in the UK and their families back in Kosovo, that put a strain on many refugees who could not afford to study.

“It was impossible to pay for the fees, we did not have good jobs then and we needed to maintain ourselves and sent money back home. It was impossible, only for rich people! Then, after 5 years when I got ILR, I applied and I got a place to study computer science. First of all now I paid for home fees plus I could get help from the bank.” Florin (M, 30+, s, arr:1990, IT consultant)

“With my friend we decided that we had to get out of the waitress job circle and do something, study or whatever! I could not afford university, so I studied to become a beautician, and this is what I have done for the past seven years now.” Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

Kostovicova and Prestreshi (2003) claim that it is currently estimated that between 10% and 15% of the Albanians in the UK are involved in postsecondary education. They also explain that some refugees developed coping strategies to overcome the obstacles presented by the lack of a legal status by arranging special deals with their university for the payment of the fees or, in extreme cases, by faking their IDs and claiming to be from a European Union member state.

After the end of the war in 1999, people began to have less responsibilities and worries

about Kosovo and, therefore, they began to have more money and were in a better frame of mind for returning to study. Those who had studied, or had started to study in Kosovo before fleeing, had mostly studied for science degrees, because social sciences and humanities departments were the first targets of the regime and, consequently, the first to be shut. In the UK only exams undertaken for engineering course were recognised, while people with degrees in other areas had to requalify (Kostovicova and Prestreshi, 2003). In exile the choice of the courses refugees decided to study for were either determined by what they had studied before exile or by the interest in getting a degree that could help them to better their situation in the UK as well as their wish to be able to contribute to the reconstruction and development of Kosovo (Kostovicova and Prestreshi, 2003).

As for children, status made no difference to educational entitlement up to the age of 16. All refugee and asylum-seeking children can use pre-school facilities (such as local authority nurseries) and children aged 5 to 15 are required go to school. Kosovar Albanian children have, generally, done very well at school and enjoy the British system and approach to teaching. Some of them had attended the schools set up by the parallel Albanian government in Kosovo, often in private houses, and appreciated particularly the facilities they found here in school and the more informal way of teaching.

6.3.8 Employment

For most of the period during which refugees arrived spontaneously from Kosovo, asylum seekers were allowed to apply for a work permit after six months from submitting an asylum claim (Smart, 2004).

Having a job allowed people to be self sufficient and independent, to maintain themselves and help their families back in Kosovo.

“When I got a job, it was really good because I could help my family in Kosovo. My father was a professor in the university and the first thing the Serbs did was close the university. My father could not find another job there and the money I managed to send home allowed all of them to go on.”

Besa (F, 30+, m, arr:1991, lawyer)

Those who arrived before 1996, had their first work experience here at the beginning. Many have managed to go up the ladder over the years and currently have 'good' jobs in London. They worked their way up from small jobs and have tried to get more qualifications or training to go further with their careers. There have been times when they were unemployed, but they considered this to be normal for anybody in life.

Good skills, education and the ability to speak English increased the chances of employment and allowed people to get better jobs. However, the most important factor to get a job was their legal status. In fact, in many cases, an uncertain status stopped employers from offering a position because it was not clear whether it was legal for them to employ people with a temporary form of status or because they worried that the refugees could be sent back soon.

"I did well at the interview. They sent me all the papers and everything, but when they checked and saw that I was an asylum seeker, they said they were sorry, but they worried that I could be sent back soon." Zani (M, 40+, s, arr:1997, unemployed)

It was not surprising that, Kosovar Albanians who arrived after 1996 and were still asylum seekers or with ELR at the time of the interview struggled more to find a job. Commonly, people have done some interpreting work for NGOs or for community associations, or have found jobs in factories, or in building sites. Some people were employed by the Kosovo Programme that was set up to receive the refugees who came through the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme.

All of them agreed that working was important in order to feel active, independent and stop thinking too much about the problems back in Kosovo. As a matter of fact, some respondents had experience of volunteering and said that even if they did not earn any money, it helped them to get busy, learn new skills and know more people.

Those who came after 1999 were particularly misinformed about their right to work, and given the restricted support they received and the limitations of the voucher system, some of them worked in the black market and risked compromising their stay in the UK.

6.3.9 Gender relations

Life in exile has brought both changes and continuity in the gender relations within the Kosovar Albanian community in the UK. Gender relations in exile are influenced by the political, social, economic and cultural context of the host country and by the legacy of the culture and the society of the country of origin. On the one hand, the experience of exile can bring changes to the relationship between men and women redefining their identity and their roles, on the other hand it can also lead to the maintenance or reinforcement of previously established roles and relations.

Life in exile has brought both change and continuity to gender relations within the Kosovar Albanian community in the UK. For Kosovar Albanian women exile has been a difficult but empowering experience. However, this empowerment has had limited boundaries imposed by the Albanian ethnic community itself. Kostovicova and Presteshi (2003) describe this paradox as limited liberation and explain that, for example, one of the limitations imposed on them is the fact that intermarriage with members of any other ethnic/national groups in the UK is frowned upon, an issue also raised during my interviews as I discuss below.

In the UK, women from Kosovo who arrived before 1996 gained a sense of independence and liberation by working and supporting themselves, living on their own and providing for their families back in Kosovo. Their empowerment has mainly happened through work or education and their experience in the work place or in universities and colleges has allowed them to meet people and form friendships outside the community.

“I am very independent here, I have spent my youth here on my own, it has been hard but now I am happy with who I am and what I have managed to achieve. Initially it was a very solitary life. I was worried about home and I had to support myself here and my family in Kosovo when they fired my father from his job. In those years I functioned like a robot blocking all my emotions out. But now things are getting better, I have lots of friends, from all sorts of background, people I met in college, at work or just hanging around.” Albana (F, 30+, s, arr: 1990, employee)

However, Kostovicova and Prestreshi (2003) explain that this new found independence was not pushed as far as to marry a non-Albanian partner. The main reason for intra-national dating is said to be patriotism, making women responsible for the preservation of the community ethnic boundaries. However, some women point the finger at the conservative views of the Albanian community and stress the inequality that makes it more acceptable for men to marry outside of the community. I interviewed two women who were friends separately, but they knew I was talking to both of them. One of them, Alina, was married with a conational, while the other was single. Ada told me that she was dating a non-Albanian person and she asked me not to tell Alina about it. She explained that:

“You see, she (Alina) has done better than me, but she had her boyfriend here with her from the beginning and they have had each other during these terrible years, they had a family. I was here alone, and it was not easy for me. Now I have found the right person, but he is not Albanian and I don’t care. But they would not understand me, they would think I am an easy girl and I do not think about my people. If I was the man it would be different. You know, old mentality! Men can do what they want, we can’t. People have been here for so long, but certain ideas don’t leave their heads.” Ada (F, 30+, s, arr:1991, shop manager)

Kostovicova and Prestreshi (2003) also note that, ironically, young Albanian women regardless of their commitment to the Albanian community through the preservation of the ‘Albanian family’, have found that their emancipation has actually become an obstacle to finding an Albanian partner.

“Albanian men are too scared of me. I am too independent; they know I could not stand certain things and they know that I do not need to accept things because I can support myself. That is why they rather go for someone sent to them from Kosovo, so that they can feel in control.” Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

As a matter of fact, the number of arranged marriages in the Albanian community in the UK seems to have been on the increase over the recent years, because, as Kostovica and Prestreshi state:

“Women in the UK are perceived as having ceased to be authentic bearers of Albanian identity just by their mere pursuit of opportunities, mainly educational and economic, offered by the diasporic milieu. In it, they are expected to re-traditionalise their mores and expectations in order to become accepted and acceptable guardians of the ethnic community.” (Kostovicova and Prestreshi, 2003)

The women who came after the outbreak of the war had different problems, some of them had been raped during the war, but felt they could not tell their family and tried to cope with no help and support. Others, who came with their husbands and children, remained alone to handle their situation in the UK when their husbands were detained after the family had been refused asylum. This is the story of Juliana who came with her family and claimed asylum in April 1999. They were refused in 2000 and launched an appeal.

“They called my husband for an interview with immigration officers. He went and they said that our appeal had been refused and they took him and sent him to a detention centre near the airport. Then they sent me a letter saying that me and my son had to join him to be deported. I was desperate, I could only speak to my husband on the phone, but I could not go to see him. I asked for help to all the people I knew, my English teacher helped me to get a better solicitor, she talked to MPs and many other people and in the end we managed, we got the deportation order suspended. But many others were not so lucky and were sent back.” Juliana (F, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

6.3.10 Socialising

The majority of the interviewees were in touch with other Kosovar Albanians in the UK and some of them also had British friends. Initially the community in London was small and very informal, they formed close relationship with each other and tried to help and support newcomers. Language problems made it difficult for them to talk to British people at the beginning and the improvements with the language was reflected on the ability to communicate with more people outside the Kosovar Albanian community.

It was emphasised by various interviewees that other people did not know about Kosovo and it was not easy to explain to them what was happening and what they were going through.

“In the beauty salon (where she worked), it was hard to hear people worried about their skin or their nails while my people in Kosovo were dying! I could not chat about these things and they could not listen to my problems.”

Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

For those who went to university making friends outside the Kosovar Albanian community was easier, because they found that young people were more open, the university was a very international environment and, especially, because they were seen as students, like anyone else, rather than as refugees.

In general, the refugees who arrived in the first half of the 1990s now have a permanent status or have acquired British citizenship, are fluent in English and many of them have good jobs and own a house. They are still concerned about the situation in Kosovo and its future and they are still helping their families there, however, they feel less worried about it and this has allowed them the serenity and the time to cultivate social relations here. None of them complained about discrimination and harassment and many saw themselves as Londoners besides being Kosovar Albanians.

As I explained, people who arrived after 1996 and during and after 1999, have faced different problems in the UK and found building social relations particularly difficult. The uncertainty of their status, the daily worries about basic needs, the language barriers,

the isolated existence in some towns where they were often the only Albanians for a long period of time, had an impact on their ability to make friends. The dispersal system forced them out of London where the majority of other Kosovar Albanians were living and the impossibility to get enough cash made travelling by train or calling over the phone very difficult. It was common to save as much money as possible towards buying a mobile phone, the only way to remain in touch with people when being moved around the country. Unfortunately, for many local people and service providers, the fact that they had a mobile phone proved that they were ‘bogus’ refugees, as a mobile phone was only seen as a superfluous luxury item.

“I get the vouchers and £10 in cash. I want to collect the money to buy a mobile phone, so my friends from London and my solicitor can find me.”

Ardian (M, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

They, often, experienced hostility from local authority officials and service providers and their feeling of exclusion was emphasised by the use of vouchers. Moreover, the negative press and the awareness of incidents of attacks against asylum seekers scared them and stopped them from going out at certain times of the day. None of the respondents had been personally attacked, but some of them knew other asylum seekers who had been harassed, including the case of a Kosovar Albanian who had been attacked and received serious head injury.

In 1999, NATO’s bombing campaign dominated the news and Kosovar refugees were positively represented in the media making British people particularly sympathetic towards Kosovar Albanians in the UK and for a certain time they seemed more aware of the reasons why they had come to the UK.

“Finally, I thought, the world heard what happened to us. I felt they were finally understanding us, but when the newspaper stopped and the government started saying that now we should go home, everything returned as it always used to be, we became invisible again.” Mitat (M, 40+, s, arr:1998, unemployed)

As a matter of fact, the solidarity and the sympathy were easily forgotten once Kosovo stopped making the first page headlines and the fear and the worry about racist attacks and about their future here became even stronger now that many of them risked deportation. Moreover, many had felt misrepresented and used by journalists who had gone to interview them during the war.

Smart explains that:

“Once the spotlight of public concern shifts, it is the community organisations that are left to provide support, and in the case of the Kosovars, lack of resources is making this difficult. The impact of media reporting is now seen as overwhelmingly negative. Stories that criticise the numbers of asylum seekers, the cost of asylum support, or report increasing public hostility to asylum seekers, sometimes mentioning Kosovars as an example, add to feelings of isolation among Kosovars.” (Smart, 2004, p.30)

Local churches and mosques around the country have provided Kosovar Albanians with support and created a platform for them to meet other people and establish new relationships. English classes, when available, offered the same opportunity and allowed them to establish friendships with teachers and other class mates.

In some cases, psychological conditions prevented the refugees from cultivating any relationships with fellow Kosovar Albanians or with other people.

“Here I have no social life. I have no energy. Only the responsibility of my youngest son keeps me going. Sometimes I wish a strong illness could get me and make me die. You see, because of my depression I cannot be in very crowded places, I get sick. Other Kosovars? What do we meet for? We all have problems and I cannot listen to other problems, it becomes like a competition of problems! Just to get out of this house, sometimes I go for a coffee around the corner. This area is quiet, where I was before it was too busy and I could not go with all the people in the street. I like visits of other

people at home, like you, so I can talk and take it all out.” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

6.3.11 Community Organisations

The Kosovar Albanian community in the UK is relatively young and there are few organised activities taking place mostly in London. Kosovar Albanians were among the very first Albanians to arrive in the UK (Kostovicova and Prestreshi, 2003). The first attempts to set up some community organisations took place in the mid-1990s. In those years, many efforts to organise an Albanian cultural centre failed, however, other activities were set up such as a Student Association and an Islamic centre. Other organisations were set up during the 1999 war to help the new refugees coming to the UK and make the voice of the community heard. These activities were suspended after the war ended and new organisations were created instead to support, more generally, Albanian-speaking people in the UK.

During the 1990s, there were different obstacles for the creation of community associations and the organisation of activities; the main problems were a lack of funding and a lack of time and resources. Refugees in London met often informally at a coffee place in North-West London on Sunday nights, but they were too busy trying to support themselves in the UK, study and send some money back home, to dedicate time and efforts to organise the community in a more formal way. Furthermore, as we have seen already in the previous sections, as time went by the Kosovar Albanian population became more and more heterogeneous, people had escaped from Kosovo at different times, had various statuses and faced the consequences of different support systems in the UK. Moreover, personal differences in terms of age, education, social background and political ideas made it even more difficult for them to come together as an organised community. Overall, the different associations that were set up during the years were more oriented towards helping refugees to settle and support newcomers, especially those who came in 1999 through the evacuation programme set up by IOM and the UNHCR, very little official activities were oriented to the cause of the Kosovar Albanian population in Kosovo. I list some of the community organisations below and provide a brief summary

of their activities in the UK, before analysing the refugees support to the cause of their co-nationals in Kosovo.

In the mid-1990s some of the Kosovar Albanians who managed to go back to university set up the Society of Albanian Students centred at University College London, which had a relatively short life (Kostovicova and Prestreshi, 2003). In 1994, a group of Kosovars set up the Kosova Islamic Centre UK in London in order to overcome the problem of having to relate to other Muslim communities in the UK, which had very different religious views and ways of practicing Islam. Kostovicova and Prestreshi explain that:

“At the very beginning, devout Kosovo Albanians went to the Central Mosque in Baker Street or to their local mosques and Islamic centres. However, they found their Asian co-religionists were patronising, authoritative and strict. At the same time, they felt estranged by the cultural customs that they felt were imposed as Islamic without tolerance for their cultural input in the practise of religion.” (Kostovicova and Prestreshi, 2003, p.1091)

The centre is still operating and is used as a mosque to pray and for social gatherings. It also offers services like a Madrasa for the Education of Children and Adults, an Islamic library and is used by about 600 believers.

In 1997, another community organisation, Albanian Youth Action, was set up by a group of volunteers in London in order to meet the needs of a growing numbers of unaccompanied teenage Albanian refugees coming from Kosovo as well as from Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro escaping from conflicts in the Balkans. The organisation is still fully operating in London and provides young Albanian speaking refugees with support to adapt to life in the UK and achieve their potential, while maintaining their own culture. The organisation runs several activities from providing general advice on benefits, accessing legal and immigration advice, housing, doctors appointments, etc. to offering assistance to find a job, registering with schools and colleges, contacting families at home, running group activities involving art, drama, and sport, organising weekend activities and holidays.

Other organisations were set up in 1999 during the war to represent the views of the refugee community on the situation in Kosovo and help the new arrivals; most of these were closed a few months after the war finished like Hope for Kosova and Kosova Phoenix. The former was coordinated by a Kosovar Albanian journalist who was a refugee in the UK, Hamide Latifi; the association had the aim of serving as a bridge between Kosovar refugees in Britain, local communities and institutions as well as organisations in Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia and worked a lot to help women. The organisation does not exist any longer, Hamide Latifi went back to Kosovo after the war and since 2000 she has been Country Director of the Kosovo Office of Women for Women International helping women to rebuild their life in Kosovo.

Kosova Phoenix was another women's organisation set up during the war, which was a small community organisation set up by some of the refugees who had arrived in London in the early 1990s with the aim of assisting and supporting especially women refugees. Months after the war the organisation ceased to exist.

Following the end of the war, between 2000-2001, while some of the organisations that were active during the war were closing down, new organisations were set up. In January 2001, a group of volunteers formed a refugee support programme for all Albanian refugees and immigrants in the UK called Shpresa, which means Hope. Like Albanian Youth Action, the organisation is not exclusively focused on Kosovar Albanians in the UK, but provides support to all Albanian-speaking asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The aim of the organisation is to help them to settle and fully participate in society, gain confidence and make progress in their lives. By the end of 2002, more than 160 Albanian families were using Shpresa's services which include women's support groups, a men's drop-in centre, a young people programme, English language classes and help with translation. The organisation has also supported a group of young people who wanted to create a music group performing music from their own culture that could act as a means of communication with other non-Albanian young people and perform during the UK's annual Refugee Week and on Albanian Flag Day.

Outside of London, there are not many Kosovar Albanian led activities. However, in the year 2000 in Leeds, which was one of the main destinations for evacuated refugees within

the Kosovo Programme, a group of people created the Kosova Club or 'Klubi Kosova' in order to support those refugees who did not return to Kosovo. This was replaced by Albanian Unity or 'Bashkesia Shqiptare' which was created as a fully constituted community organisation in 2001 and represents all ethnic Albanians (from Kosova, Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) living in Leeds and close by, with the aim to provide support for Albanians and help them in their integration in the UK.

The vast majority of the interviewees who had been in the UK since the early 1990s said to be disappointed that the general public in the UK ignored the conflict in Kosovo and the problems they faced. However, they did not organise significant formal activities to raise awareness about the Kosovo crisis and to put pressure on the UK government to intervene.

While it has been established, during the fieldwork and through secondary sources, that all the refugees contributed to support their families back in Kosovo, it was not clear whether a more organised system of collection of a self-taxation to support the Albanian parallel government's structures in Kosovo existed. None of the interviewees, neither refugees nor coordinators of community organisations could answer my question. Similarly, their political views and alignment with political parties in Kosovo was not an easy subject to discuss and people were vague in their answers. This was because either they feared that this could play against their asylum or appeal decision or, as a couple of them explained, because they were not used to discuss political matters about Kosovo with people outside the community.

"Here they are not used to discuss political things about Kosovo with other people. Others don't know Kosovo politics and they are not interested either, to be honest. With other Kosovars you can often end up fighting if you have different ideas, so you just learn not to talk about it. You only talk about the large picture and leave the details to yourself." Omer (M, 30+, m, arr:1990, engineer)

When NATO launched the bombing campaign the refugees in the UK were taken by a storm of mixed emotions, on the one hand, they were happy that the international

community was finally intervening, on the other hand, they were extremely worried about the consequences for their people in Kosovo. Some of the men had probably gone back to join the KLA and fight, but this was not a subject that could be touched in depth during the interviews. Some of the women talked more openly about it, for example Denisa said that:

“When NATO started bombing, my first thought was to go back, enrol and fight. I was watching the news all the time and I felt I had to fight. Some of the men I knew went, but in the end I did not go because I heard they were raping women, you know I could stand a bullet, but not rape and humiliation.” Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

In the UK, most of the advocacy activities in support of Kosovar Albanians in Kosovo took place in 1999, with some refugees and organisations being more active than others in this respect; for example, in March 1999, at the height of NATO’s bombing campaign, Hamide Latifi of Hope for Kosova addressed a Ministry of Defence briefing defending the UK’s leading role in the destruction of the Serb military machine (Hanna, 1999) and in April 1999 Kosova Phoenix expressed their worries about the refugee crisis in Kosovo and neighbouring countries to the International Development Select Committee of the House of Commons.

6.3.12 Summary

Before looking at the Italian context and analyse the experience of Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy, Table 6.1 offers a summary of the key points that have characterised their experience in the UK.

Spontaneous Arrivals	Refugees' life in the UK was influenced by the 1996 and 1999 Asylum and Immigration Acts. It is useful to distinguish three different groups in relation to the time of arrival: before 1996, between 1996 and 1999, 1999.
Legal Status	We can distinguish between different types of legal status: asylum seekers and refugees, people with ELR or ILR, temporarily protected refugees, family reunion cases. Status affected most aspects of their life in the UK (housing, jobs, education, etc.).
Support and Benefits	Refugees offered each other help and support. The kind of institutional support available depended on the asylum system in place at the time of arrival. The new legislations introduced stricter provisions and the dispersal and voucher systems.
Housing	Housing conditions were generally poor, in some cases hotels and B&Bs were assigned as accommodation by social services. Refugees with a stable status and better level of integration had managed to rent or buy better properties.
English Language	Few adult refugees managed to access language courses. The majority had to learn on their own.
Legal Advice	Mostly available in London. Difficult to obtain after dispersal.
Health	Physical and psychological healthcare was available to asylum seekers and refugees.
Education	A stable status was indispensable to be able to afford higher education. Many people waited up to 6-7 years before being able to go back to study. Schooling was available to all children.
Employment	A stable status and good language skills were indispensable to get a decent job. Asylum seekers were not allowed to work for the first six months in the UK. Some of the young refugees who arrived in the early 1990s have managed to further their career.
Gender Relations	The experience of exile empowered many women. This had an impact on their relationship with other members of the community.
Social Life	Socialising required time and effort. In any case, it was easier to socialise with other Albanians because of language and cultural factors. Relations with British people depended especially on the ability to speak English.
Community Organisations	The community in the UK is relatively young and the few existing organised activities take place mostly in London. The first attempts to set up some community organisations took place in the mid-1990s, many of them are now shut and new ones have replaced them. Their main aim has been, and still is, that of improving the conditions of Kosovar Albanians in the UK.

TABLE 6.1: Summary of the refugees' experience in the UK

6.4 Conclusions

This chapter dealt with the settlement of Kosovar Albanians in the UK. It provided a short overview of the country's general approach to asylum referring to policies, media representation and public discourse, as well as the role of the voluntary sector and refugee organisations.

Having set the background, it analysed various situations that different waves of Kosovar Albanians found when they arrived in the UK during the 1990s and analysed the way in which the environment in the country of exile shaped their settlement. Then it considered the impact of different legal statuses and asylum support systems on their experience in exile and focused on specific aspects of their lives such as: health, education, employment, housing, legal advice, language skills, gender relations, socialising and community organisations.

The next chapter focuses on the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy following a similar structure. Moreover, it analyses the differences and similarities between the UK and the Italian contexts in order to explain the kind of impact these differences had on refugee integration and on their decision in relation to return.

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Chapter 7

Reception and settlement of Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy: the case of spontaneous arrivals

7.1 Introduction

Having analysed the reception and settlement experience of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK, this chapter deals with the case of Kosovar Albanians in Italy. It focuses on the refugees' experiences in Italy and analyses their interactions with the context they found upon arrival. An analysis of their settlement experiences is relevant when attempting to understand the impact of the relationship with the receiving society and its policies on the refugees' decision-making process in relation to return.

Following the structure of Chapter 6, this chapter begins with a brief overview of the previous interaction between politics, media, public opinion, NGOs and refugees in Italy in relation to immigration and asylum. This is necessary in order to understand the situation Kosovar Albanian refugees found when they arrived in Italy. Having set the background, it provides an analysis of their collective and individual interaction with

conditions in exile.

As in Chapter 6, this chapter considers the cases of both anticipatory and acute refugees who arrived spontaneously in Italy during the 1990s. It gives particular attention to the differences in social class, education, age and gender of the refugees and their different relationship with the conflict in the country of origin. The aim is that of exploring the ways in which these differences impacted on the refugees' interplay with the policies and society of the receiving country, and affected their modes of settlement. Moreover, the final section entitled 'Comparing settlement experiences', analyses differences and similarities between the reception and settlement of Kosovar Albanians who arrived spontaneously in the UK or in Italy in order to highlight the impact of the exile context on refugee integration and on their decision in relation to return.

7.2 Migration and Asylum Policies in Italy

The following sections present a brief account of migration and asylum policies in Italy providing the necessary background to better understand the conditions and the general environment that Kosovar Albanian refugees had to interact with when arriving in Italy during the 1990s.

For more than a century, since its unification in 1861 and until the economic boom of the 1960s, Italy was a country of emigration rather than one of immigration (Maciotti and Pugliese, 1993). In fact, between 1860 and 1920, it was the second most important country of emigration in Europe, after the British Isles (Bade 2003) and it is estimated that between 1876, which was the year when official records begun to be collected, and the 1970s about 26 million emigrants left Italy to go abroad (Favero and Tassello, 1978) mostly to the US, South America, other European countries and Italy's colony in North Africa.

Therefore, when the migration flow started to change direction, Italy was unprepared and the country took a while before realising its new condition as a country of immigration. Although the influx of immigrants to Italy started to increase at the beginning of the 1970s, it is only in the 1981 census that the country discovered to have switched from

being a country of emigration to one of immigration (Zincone, 1993). This change was mainly due to the decline of the emigration flow, the return migration of many Italians from abroad and the consequences of the ‘closed door policy’ of Northern European countries, which caused the increase in the migration influx to Mediterranean European countries during the 1980s. Within this context, several factors contributed in bringing about a significant increase in the migratory influx in Italy: the geographical proximity to the countries of origin of many migrants, the lack of specific policies on migration that allowed an easy entry into Europe and offered good possibilities of transit to Northern States, and the improved economy of the country.

Bade explains that:

“In Italy, where intercontinental south-north migration to the Euro-Mediterranean region emerged earliest and strongest, immigration controls were deliberately treated liberally, unbureaucratically and for a long time generally without a visa stamp, because the overwhelming majority of foreigners were tourists.” (Bade, 2003, p.235)

Undoubtedly, at the early stages of this new phenomenon Italy was not prepared to face the consequences of a growing migratory inflow and the initial political answers were given in the form of emergency measures. However, as discussed later on, ‘improvisation’ and ‘emergency’ seem to have turned into permanent features of the Italian political response to immigration and show the difficulty of both politicians of all political orientations and public opinion to accept the new reality of migration. For example, Italy is the EU member state which has had the highest number of amnesties (sanatorie) to tackle the problem of illegal migration. Since the mid-eighties there have been a total of five amnesties in 1986, 1990, 1995, 1998 and 2002. Moreover, throughout most of the 1990s, the approach to immigration focused mostly on new arrivals, rather than on those migrants who were already settled (Zetter et al., 2002), with a consequent general lack of an integration strategy at the national level. The task of taking care of the needs of migrants was left in the hands of voluntary organisations, especially within the catholic voluntary sector, which handled most of the emergencies and dealt with many aspects

of the immigrants' life in Italy. Their work earned them a central role within the debate on immigration in the country and turned them into key providers of social assistance. Zetter et al. note that "the dominant role played principally by Caritas in organising and responding to the needs generated by this new social context, permitted the Italian political system to abdicate responsibility for the phenomenon" (Zetter et al., 2002, p.71). Policy makers' reluctance to deal with the immigrant population is also emphasised by their general efforts to stress and revive the links with Italian emigrants abroad rather than improving the conditions for immigrants in Italy. For example, in 1992, the country passed a law on citizenship (law 91) that confirmed *ius sanguinis* to be the main criterion to become an Italian citizen and established that foreign citizens need to have had permanent residence in the country for ten years before being able to apply for citizenship (Zincone, 2000). Almost ten years later, in 2001, Italy passed another law (law n. 459) to ensure the right to vote of Italian citizens resident abroad, many of which are descendents of Italian emigrants who have never been to Italy and are also citizens of the state they were born in, while the political participation of immigrants still remains the subject of controversial debates and is mostly discussed only in relation to local elections. In a study on second-generation migrants, Andall (2002) confirms the view that despite the presence of migrant communities already into the second generation, public and political attention in Italy has continued to focus on new waves of migration and undocumented migration. Therefore, "the conditions of settled communities have tended to be of peripheral concern to immigration social policy makers" (Andall, 2002, p.389).

Currently, despite some improvements, the issue of immigration in Italy is still predominantly dealt with in relation to border controls and national security issues, with emergency responses and amnesties still playing an important part in the political approach to the issue, while the voluntary sector is still the main provider of assistance for immigrants in the country. This is even more so in the case of asylum and refugee issues. The following section explores in more detail the issue of asylum in Italy, the reaction of the media and public opinion to asylum seekers and refugees and the role of the voluntary sector and refugee organisations.

7.2.1 Asylum policies in Italy: 1990s

The question of political asylum has been even more neglected than general immigration issues by Italian policy makers over the years and, in general, the topic is not strongly debated as a distinct issue in the media and in public debate as it is the case in many Northern European countries. Bade explains that while during the 1980s in central, western and northern Europe, the concerns in public and political discussions about the immigrant population that emerged from labour migration receded behind the issue of 'asylum', in the Euro-Mediterranean zone, it is the subject of 'illegality' that moved to the fore. In fact, in southern Europe, asylum played only a minor role up to the late 1980s, whereas illegal immigration did not become the focus of discussion in central, western and northern Europe until the 1990s (Bade, 2003).

In Italy this is still the case, asylum is not at the top of the political agenda and public debate, and it is mostly the concern of voluntary associations and NGOs. As a matter of fact, Italy as of 2004 remained the only EU country¹ with no specific legislation on asylum and, over the past fifteen years, has dealt with various refugee crises on an emergency basis. The country ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention on the status of refugees in 1954 but did not sign the 1967 Protocol which lifted the 'geographical limitation' to refugees coming from European countries until 1990. Consequently, for almost forty years, refugees coming from areas outside of Europe did not have any right to apply for political asylum and Italy was the only European country with refugees recognised under the UNHCR mandate (Joly, 1992). Finally, in 1990, Italy passed Law n. 39, known as the Martelli Law, which represented a first level of harmonisation with other European countries' legislation on the entry and permanence of non-European foreigners. The most relevant changes brought by this law in matters of asylum were the withdrawal of the geographic restriction to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the introduction, for the first time, of specific provisions on asylum (CIR, 1990). However, the law established only a few minimum standards in relation to the asylum procedure in article 1. According to this article: asylum applications are examined by the Central Commission for Refugee Status Determination² and asylum seekers are entitled to minimum assistance while

¹Here we refer to the EU member states before the enlargement of 2004.

²The Central Commission for Refugee Status Determination which is the competent administrative

waiting for an answer; they can only receive 25.000 liras per person per day (about 12 euros) for the first 45 days (CIR, 1996a) and have no right to work.

It is not surprising that the number of asylum claims under the 1951 Geneva Convention has been very low in Italy over the years. Under these conditions, considering the average waiting time for a decision from the central commission (typically at least a year), asylum seekers risk to remain without support, work permits and rights to family reunification for a long time. The table below shows the number of applications submitted from 1990 until 2001 and the number of applications actually examined by the commission every year, illustrating also the generally low acceptance rate ³.

Year	Submitted Applications	Applications Examined	Accepted Claims
1990	4830	1466	824
1991	26470	20076	944
1992	6040	6960	336
1993	1650	1955	165
1994	1790	1699	298
1995	1730	1741	282
1996	680	791	175
1997	1860	1854	348
1998	11120	5005	1108
1999	33360	8311	809
2000	15560	24438	1642
2001	9620	13344	2098

TABLE 7.1: Asylum Applications and final decision (1990-2001) Source: Caritas, 2002

This explains why, even during the 1990s, many refugees preferred to enter the country illegally and live clandestinely until yet another amnesty for illegal labour migrants gave them the chance to regularise their position, while others received a residence permit through family reunification or simply transited through Italy in order to reach other destinations in Western Europe.

Given the shortcomings of the law it was necessary to develop emergency plans to be able to cope with the acute refugee crisis throughout the 1990s. From 1991 to 1996, the Italian government faced many emergencies due to new influxes of immigrants and asylum seekers (Albanians, Somalis, former Yugoslavs, etc.), and was forced to look for

body deciding about asylum claims.
³Statistical data about asylum in Italy show small variations in different sources.

some possible solutions outside the Martelli Law. For example, the first refugee influx from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia had to be dealt with within this context and required *ad hoc* legislation when the number of people seeking asylum began to increase; this was provided through decree-law 27 (May 1992), granting humanitarian entry visas at the border, which was then converted into Law 390 (September 1992). As Hein (2000) notes, although the law does not use the specific term, it was clearly meant as measure of temporary protection and it preceded even the UNHCR recommendation of July 1992 on temporary protection. In the mid-nineties the problems related to immigrants and asylum seekers were at the top of the national political agenda. Proposals to amend Law n.39 came from both centre-right parties and centre-left ones. The former aimed at a severe enforcement of expulsions and promoted a harsh condemnation of illegal entries and permanence. The latter, were proposing a new ‘amnesty’ to regularise the people who were staying in Italy illegally, but could prove they had a job (CIR, 1995).

In 1996, the newly elected centre-left government, decided that ‘it was no longer acceptable to carry on with a policy based on ‘decrees’ issued to face emergencies or local problems and it was time to tackle the inadequacy of the existing structures, the lack of reception and settlement policies (CIR, 1996b). Therefore, the government decided to promote a new comprehensive framework, in an attempt to provide a more coherent and broader political response. In 1998, the Parliament passed Law n. 40 ‘Disciplina dell’immigrazione e dello straniero’ which introduced important innovations such as: a residence card (obtainable after having spent five years in Italy with a regular renewable residence permit) which allows an active participation in public life, including the right to vote in local elections (art.7); specific anti-discrimination and anti-racist measures (art. 41-42); measures on intercultural education (art.36) and integration policies (art.44). In relation to asylum issues, the new bill included only an expulsion ban applying to those foreigners who might risk being persecuted because of their race, gender, language, nationality, religion, political opinion, personal or social condition (art.17) and measures for humanitarian emergencies in case of conflict, natural disasters and other severe events taking place in non EU states (art. 18). This was mainly due to the fact that the government had decided to exclude from Law n.40 the subject of asylum in order to prepare a specific bill on the subject that would have represented Italy’s first

legislation on asylum. In 1997, Prodi's government presented a bill on asylum (draft n. 5381) which was given the green light by the Chamber of Deputies just the day before the President of the Italian Republic dissolved parliament to pave the way for national elections in May. This left no time for the Senate to re-discuss it and give it final approval and since then, no further attempts have been made⁴.

This implied that until 1999, the year of NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo, asylum issues were still mostly dealt with on an *ad hoc* emergency basis in Italy, conditions for asylum seekers had not yet improved and NGOs were still the main providers of services and support for both economic migrants and refugees.

For the Italian media and public opinion the distinction between labour migrants and refugees in public discourse is often blurred. This is not surprising in a country that does not have specific asylum policies where most refugees follow other routes to legalise their position rather than claiming asylum.

In media reporting the words 'immigrato' or 'extracomunitario' (person coming from outside the European Union) are often used for any person coming from countries troubled by poverty or by war with no distinction between refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants. Following the waves of emergency situations, the media refer to 'rifugiati' (refugees), 'profughi' (refugees), 'sfollati' (evacuees) mostly in relation to mass refugee influx coming from conflicts which dominate the news at a specific moment. This was the case for the early arrivals of Albanians, Bosnians and Kosovars.

In general, the international relevance of a crisis coupled with welcoming government policies seem to have led to positive press reports and positive attitudes towards refugees from the public. However, the situation has often changed as soon as the refugee producing conflict stopped being under the spotlight and the government toughened their policies. An emblematic example of this is the case of Albanian refugees in the early 1990s.

The first influx of Albanians arrived in Italy in July 1990 (after the Embassies crises in Tirana) and in a few years they have gone through different migratory situations.

⁴The following government modified the asylum procedure with a new immigration Law n. 189/2002 adopting a more restrictive approach, but did not attempt to draft a specific legislation on asylum.

Initially, those who entered the Italian embassy in Tirana, around 800 individuals, were granted refugee status. The newspapers were talking about them as ‘sons of the same sea’ (Balbo and Manconi, 1992) and the population was welcoming them with sympathy. In this general positive atmosphere, a joint protest by the trade unions and the general public stopped the government from taking any restrictive measures against the first mass arrivals in the summer of 1990. However, in 1991 the reaction to the increasing arrivals of ships to the Italian coasts vis-à-vis the European pressures towards the adoption of restrictive policies in the light of the Schengen Agreement, prevented the government from prolonging the state of emergency. Consequently, Albanians were dismissed as *prima facie* economic migrants and deported without being allowed to apply for refugee status (CIR, 1991). In August 1991, the episode of the overcrowded tow-boat of Albanians, waiting in the Adriatic Sea to dock in the port of Brindisi, covered the pages of many European newspapers. The Italian government, again unprepared to face the situation, left the ship in the offing for several days. Then, people were put in a football stadium with no assistance, while the government decided to send them back to Albania (Delle Donne, 1995). The expulsion was followed by the militarisation of the Adriatic sea in order to stop the influx and by the Italian Pellicano Operation offering aid and co-operation in Albania as an alternative to migration (Campani, 1995). Considering the sympathetic reaction of the Italian population towards the earliest arrivals of Albanians, we would expect protests and demonstrations against these last decisions of the government and a general opposition to the expulsion orders but this did not happen, as Italy was caught by what Delle Donne defines as the ‘invasion syndrome’ when she explains that:

“[...] the reaction of panic, fed by the media and by the inaction of the government and public institutions, in the face of the ship swarming with Albanians, set in motion a psychological mechanism of non-acceptance and opposition.” (Delle Donne, 1995, p.115)

Consequently, the positive image of the Albanian turned into a very negative one. Moreover, the official block of Albanian immigration did not stop the influx that turned its way towards illegality. Smuggling immigrants became a profitable business in the hands

of the Pugliese Mafia 'Sacra Corona Unita' (Perlmutter, 1998) and Albanian smugglers, a phenomenon that contributed as well to the construction of the negative stereotype of the Albanian immigrant.

As already mentioned, in Italy the voluntary sector plays a central role even in the reception and integration process of asylum seekers and refugees and many organisations deal both with economic migrants and refugees. The Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati (the Italian Refugee Council) is the national agency which coordinates and develops activities carried out by various organisations and associations in defence of refugees and asylum seekers rights. NGOs are also the main advocacy groups and play a key role in the public debate on immigration and asylum. They were the leading force behind the creation of the PNA (Programma Nazionale Asilo), a project which involves national NGOs, institutional and international actors and represents a first effort to establish a nationally coordinated reception and support services for asylum seekers and refugees. Currently, they are the main group lobbying for Italy to adopt a specific bill on asylum and monitoring the consequences of the latest immigration law for refugees.

In Italy, the better established networks of refugees are in the larger cities, especially in Rome and Milan. Some of them are formally constituted and can, therefore, apply for funding from local authorities while others are more informal organisations. In both cases, given the limited national support, these organisations have a crucial role, especially in the reception phase when they can provide assistance to new comers helping with the language, finding a job and accommodation. Zetter et al. point out that, generally, refugee organisations do not play a significant role in the political arena. They explain that:

"Lacking a national presence, in notable contrast to Germany and to a lesser extent the UK, with very few exceptions they do not participate in national-level decision-making processes. Participation in public life at the local level is more significant given the immediate needs of their communities for basic needs as much as broader political rights and recognition." (Zetter et al., 2002, p.88)

In conclusion, Italy does not have yet a specific comprehensive legislation on asylum and, therefore, the refugee reception and integration systems are still dominated by the adoption of emergency measures and by the work of NGOs and RCOs. This was the context Kosovar Albanians had to relate to when settling in the country. The following section focuses on the specific conditions encountered by Kosovar Albanian refugees during the 1990s and their integration strategies.

7.3 The case of spontaneous arrivals in Italy

This chapter deals with Kosovar Albanian refugees' spontaneous arrivals in Italy. The following section provides a short overview of the main developments that have defined the conditions faced by the refugees in Italy, which was not the immediate choice for many refugees coming from Kosovo at the beginning of the 1990s. As explained in Chapter 5, initially, many Kosovar Albanians considered it as a country of transition to other destinations and once they were in the national territory they attempted repeatedly to cross the borders. However, some of them did not manage to settle in other countries or cross the border and settled in Italy instead, attracting other refugees who left Kosovo at a later stage. The vast majority of these Kosovar Albanians did not apply for refugee status. Initially, a small number of them submitted a claim under the 1951 Geneva Convention; others received temporary protection or a residence permit through family reunification; many entered the country illegally and lived clandestinely until a new amnesty for illegal labour migrants gave them a chance to regularise their position.

During the late 1990s, the arrivals of refugees from Kosovo increased sharply and by 1998 it is estimated that they were also the largest national group of asylum seekers in the country. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to give an estimate of how many Kosovar Albanians are currently in Italy, official data of 2001 from the Ministry of Interior claimed that there were 3,493 Kosovars on the national territory, with no specific subsection for ethnic groups. In contrast with this data, the estimate of the Kosovar Albanian community leaders is that there are currently around 46.000 Kosovar Albanians in Italy. The reasons for the lack of precise statistical information is given by the fact that

Kosovar Albanians have settled with different statuses and appear in different statistics, they were often listed as citizens of the FRY and some of them are illegally in Italy. For example, the number of Kosovars who applied for convention status is not clear because they do not appear as a separate group in the statistics, but are, instead, included in the general group of applicants from the FRY. In 1999, the general number of asylum applications in Italy was about 8,356 and the number of application from the FRY was 4,456 (SISTAN, 2000).

In general, the first refugees to arrive were mostly men, while families and women came at a later stage. They reached Italy through smugglers via the Adriatic Sea or after a long trip through the Balkans, while others came officially through family reunification. They settled mainly in the north and central part of Italy, where they found better developed support networks for migrants and job opportunities. Spontaneous arrivals from Kosovo included both anticipatory refugees leaving Kosovo to escape the persecution of the Serbian authorities (this included those who were politically engaged or wanted to avoid to be conscripted in the Serbian army or had been dismissed from public jobs because of their ethnicity) and acute refugee movements of people who escaped direct danger. Their life in Italy was mostly influenced by the lack of specific provisions for refugees and by general immigration policies as well as by the widespread prejudices versus Albanian immigrants. Two specific *ad hoc* decrees, one issued during the first refugee crisis from former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and one passed in response to the specific Kosovo refugee crisis in 1999, provided many Kosovar Albanians with temporary protection.

During the 1999 NATO's bombing campaign, Italy adopted a temporary protection measure for Kosovar refugees, both evacuated refugees and spontaneous arrivals. The next chapter on the refugees who arrived through the evacuation programme deals specifically with involvement of the Italian government in the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme and the temporary protection measures adopted for the refugees in 1999. However, in order to provide a comprehensive account of the different conditions the refugees who arrived spontaneously found in Italy, in this chapter I also consider the case of those who arrived in 1999 by their own means and received temporary protection status. Many of them reached families and friends who were already settled in Italy while others received

the support of NGOs and voluntary organisations. Their arrivals within the context of a lack of an adequate reception system provided the voluntary sector with a strong incentive to create a joint project of reception called *Azione Comune 1999*. The project was funded by the EU and the Italian Ministry of Interior Affairs, while the UNHCR acted as an advisor and monitored the activities and CIR led and coordinated the project which involved a total of twelve national and international organisations. The programme began operating on the 12th of July 1999, almost a month after the end of the war, and finished on the 31st of December 1999, but was then renewed for 2000 with an extension to all asylum seekers and refugees irrespective of their nationality. *Azione Comune 1999* coordinated 34 reception centres spread throughout ten different regions and provided accommodation to about 1,000 refugees coming from Kosovo (21.77% of them were asylum seekers, 2.21% had refugee status and 52.41% were temporarily protected people); 58.66% of those assisted by the project were Kosovar Albanians and 32.05% were Kosovar Romas (Lo Prato, 2000). The programme also offered services to people who did not reside in the centres such as legal advice, health care, assistance to return and a financial contribution to rent payments if refugees had found their own accommodation. In total, the programme was used by around 12,000 people (Lo Prato, 2000). This project was relatively successful and formed the foundation of the PNA, which has established the first national system of reception and support for the integration of asylum seekers, refugees, temporarily protected people and people with permit to stay on humanitarian grounds currently involving several NGOs, the National Association of Italian Municipalities and the UNHCR.

In conclusion, Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy had to cope with the lack of provisions for asylum seekers, many settled as labour migrants, some obtained temporary protection status and few of them, arriving in 1999, had the support of the newly formed *Azione Comune*. In the following sections, I analyse the experience of Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy in relation to the following issues: legal status, support received upon arrival, housing conditions, Italian language fluency, legal advice, health, education, employment, gender relations, social life and community organisations.

7.3.1 Status

As already explained, Kosovar Albanians have used various ways to obtain a permit to stay in Italy. Until the 1999 crisis, they settled either as labour migrants or through humanitarian entry visas which were adopted with *ad hoc* decree-laws in 1992 in order to cope with the refugee influx from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and in 1999 to face the Kosovo refugee crisis.

In general, throughout the decade, many people remained illegally in the country for some time and then applied for one of the amnesties (in 1995 and 1998) while others came through family reunification. The leaders of the community explained that claiming asylum was not an option for many Kosovar Albanians in Italy, since many of them had left their family behind and wanted to feel free to go back to rescue their relatives if necessary. Submitting an asylum claim would have stopped them from being able to do so. Moreover, they explained, Italians are not aware of asylum issues and political reasons for migration, so even those who were asylum seekers always claimed to be there to work, because Italians do not like people who are assisted by the state.

“Avevano paura di chiedere asilo, perchè questo toglieva la possibilità di tornare ad aiutare le famiglie se era necessario. E poi, agli Italiani, si dice sempre per lavoro, gli Italiani non sanno di motivi politici e sono contro chi è assistito dallo stato.” Behar (M, 30+, m, arr:1991, construction site manager)

Some of the respondents who had arrived in 1998 submitted a claim upon arrival but received a negative answer in late 1999 or early 2000 saying that Kosovo was now safe and, therefore, there was no ground for their claim anymore. They received instead a humanitarian permit for a year and at the time of the interview (2002) they had converted it into a work permit. Others were still waiting for an answer and were sure that it would have come with a negative decision, therefore, they were planning alternative ways to stay, including the possibility to remain illegally. Feti said that if the decision was negative he would continue to work illegally until finding a way to get a work permit:

“Se la risposta che arriva è negativa, continuerò a lavorare in nero fino a quando non trovo il sistema per un permesso di lavoro.” Feti (M, 20+, s, arr:2001, builder)

For those who obtained humanitarian protection in 1992, the law granted a three months only residence permit with no right to work or to family reunion. Then, between 1993 and 1994, following the pressure exercised by NGOs and refugee advocates, the permit was extended to one year. It was renewable ‘automatically’ and included the right to work, the right to higher education and to family reunification (Hein, 2000). Despite the fact that refugees were given the chance of working and studying, for almost six years the future continued to look uncertain. It was only in August 1998 that an ordinance proclaimed the cessation of humanitarian protection status and people were given three options: an asylum claim under the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention; the conversion of their humanitarian residence permit into an immigration permit for two years on condition of showing evidence of a job offer; a permit on humanitarian grounds based on aliens Law n. 40 for persons unable to work for personal, health or age reasons (Hein, 2000). It is not clear how many Kosovar Albanians obtained each of these kinds of permit, since their ethnicity was not specified on the records.

Similarly, those who arrived in May 1999, during the acute refugee crisis in Kosovo, obtained a temporary form of protection. This was approved through a ministerial decree (Ministerial decree: DPCM 12 May, 1999) and both refugees who arrived spontaneously and evacuees were given the choice between submitting an asylum claim or accepting temporary protection. The decree included from the start a humanitarian residence permit, a work permit and the right to be assisted in collective centres until 31 December 1999 (Ministerial decree: DPCM 12 May, 1999) and was later extended until the 30th of June 2000. The final ministerial decree on the issue (Ministerial Decree: DPCM 1 September, 2000) detailed the terms for the cessation of temporary protection. Refugees could take part in assisted repatriation programmes or risked ‘removal’ from the national territory as the law in force prescribed. However, similarly to the case of the humanitarian protection adopted in 1992 and ended in 1998, there were other options for those refugees who wanted to stay (Commissione Permanente Affari Costi-

tuzionali 2000) through a different form of residence permit: they could claim refugee status under the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention; they could ask for a humanitarian residence permit in accordance with decree-law n. 286 (25 July 1998); or they could stay also as labour migrants if they provided all the necessary documentation by the 30th September 2000 to a police headquarters (questura) in order to prove that they had a job and accommodation (Amore, 2002b). I refer to this in the following chapter on the specific case of refugees evacuated in Italy and I examine the implications of each of these post-temporary protection options in the last chapter on return.

7.3.2 Support upon arrival and Benefits

Regardless of their status and official or unofficial presence in Italy, Kosovar Albanians have not received support from the state, with the only exception of asylum seekers who received financial support for the first 45 days after the submission of their claim. The respondents often explained that only families and friends have helped them and in some cases the local church or local support groups.

Their informal network provided support for newcomers throughout the 1990s and even during the height of the crisis. Drita, who had arrived in 1994 to reach her husband who was already in Italy, explained that in 1999 those who were already settled in Italy provided accommodation and helped those who escaped during the war. Many had shared their homes with relatives and friends who had arrived during 1998-1999 and some of them were still hosting them at the time of the interviews. She said that many were calling them once they reached Italy to ask for help and accommodation until they could manage to reach their relatives in Germany and Switzerland.

Community leaders complained about the lack of support upon arrival explaining that they tried to help as much as they could; Behar said that arriving from the shock of a war zone in a foreign country like Italy you are left totally on your own and you have no idea where to turn for help:

“Quando vieni da una guerra sei già sotto shock e qui non sai dove sbattere la testa, proprio! Non sai chi ti può aiutare.” Behar (M, 30+, m, arr:1991,

construction site manager)

The only support for refugees was the network of relatives, friends and voluntary associations offering help, but overall they had to find the way to support themselves.

7.3.3 Housing

Finding a house is a problem for the vast majority of immigrants in Italy. Throughout the 1990s, Kosovar Albanians did not receive any help from the government and had to find solutions on their own. Few of those who arrived in 1999 received help from the project Azione Comune.

Typically, at the beginning the first arrivals were mostly men who shared a rented house with other migrants or compatriots. These were often very crowded flats or old houses in extremely bad conditions which were located in neglected areas of historical city centres, suburbs or the countryside and offered just a 'roof over your head'! Through hard work and contacts, they often managed to rent 'better' places or larger houses where they could even house their families if necessary. Discrimination and racism were an obstacle to finding a decent place to rent as many landlords did not want to let to immigrants in general and to Albanians in particular.

In many cases although the house they found was in poor condition they managed to improve it up to a good standard through their own means. In some cases this was very clear when I visited them as the exterior of the house was still unfinished or in a bad state, while the flat or the house inside had been perfectly finished and arranged by the refugees. Moreover, in certain cases the landlords were clearly taking advantage of the situation. For example Saimir and his family had rented an unfinished flat in a building that was just a shell in the middle of the countryside. When I arrived to meet them, the house looked like a picture from a war zone, even the main staircase was just bare cement, broken bricks and rotten iron, but when I entered the flat, it was a very different picture. They had managed to finish it off nicely through their own efforts and resources. However, once finished, the landlord wanted it back to sell it and threatened to throw them out any day.

Another common problem was that the rent was generally very high but the landlords refused to sign an official contract or simply declared a much lower rent than what was actually paid in order to pay fewer taxes. This is common practice in Italy even with other social groups, including students, but for immigrants it has serious consequences. If they were suddenly asked to leave the accommodation, it was not easy for them to find an alternative given the general difficulties for migrants in finding appropriate housing; moreover, proof of a rental contract for the house was often required for many bureaucratic procedures.

In some cases people joined forces, managing to buy a property and fix it. For example, this was the case of four different families who bought a derelict building with their savings and managed to create four flats. In general such actions were taken by people who had arrived in the early 1990s and had managed to save enough money and build enough networks to be able to buy a property. In other cases NGOs helped the refugees to find accommodation. One of the leaders of the community, who had arrived in Italy in the late 1980s, explained that CARITAS generally helped them but also stressed that they, mostly, helped themselves. He affirmed that in the late 1990s he personally guaranteed over thirty-five flats for compatriots.

“La Caritas ha aiutato molto, ma noi Kossovare ci siamo principalmente aiutati ed organizzati da soli. Per oltre 35 appartamenti ho garantito io personalmente.” Hekuran (M, 50+, m, arr:1989, teacher)

The refugees helped by Azione Comune were assigned a place in a reception centre, wherever there was availability. In parallel to this, CIR had organised another scheme which offered a lump sum to pay for a few months' rent for private accommodation that the refugees had found on their own.

7.3.4 Italian language

Language was a big barrier for all the refugees in Italy. They did not find any official support system for learning and, in any case, they were too busy trying to survive to

have the time to attend possible classes for immigrants organised by NGOs and volunteers. In general, they learnt Italian ‘from the street’ and, therefore, they often speak a mixture of Italian and the local dialect. Not being able to speak Italian in a country with no structured reception and integration system can create all sorts of problems. Understanding what their duties and rights are, where they can find information and how the bureaucratic system works is essential for survival and being able to communicate is essential. For example, the inability to speak Italian meant that many children entered school at a lower level than their age would justify.

“Quando sono arrivato qua avevo quattordici anni e mi hanno messo in seconda media con i ragazzini più piccoli perchè non parlavo Italiano. Quindi ho perso più di due anni.” Ermal (M, 19, s, arr:1999, student)

Moreover, not speaking Italian could also create problems at work. For example, Besnik was not able to explain in Italian that he was a wall painter and managed to find a job in a furniture factory instead, where he was still working at the time of the interview. He said that only two years later, when his boss told him that he was looking for someone to repaint his house, he finally told him what his main job before coming to Italy was.

“Non parlavo una parola d’italiano quando sono arrivato, non potevo neanche spiegare cosa sapevo fare ed ho accettato il primo lavoro che ho trovato, qui in una fabbrica di mobili. Poi un giorno il padrone, mi ha detto che cercava un imbianchino, e gli ho detto: ‘ma sono io’! Ho fatto l’imbianchino per tanti anni prima di venir qua.” Besnik (M,50+, m, arr:1994, factory worker)

Once more the newcomers were helped to also overcome problems related to language and communication by those who were already in Italy, who tried to interpret for them when it was necessary.

7.3.5 Legal advice

Generally, no particular relevance was given to legal advice by most Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy, because few of them applied for asylum that required special legal

assistance. This was indispensable though for those who did submit a claim, especially given the low acceptance rate. In theory, destitute asylum seekers were entitled to legal assistance, but in practice, this was only provided by some NGOs. The main organisation providing legal support was CIR and in 1999 Azione Comune provided assistance on legal matters as well. Moreover, a few private lawyers working on a pro-bono basis were available and some offices for aliens in certain municipalities provided free legal assistance to asylum seekers during the first stage of the asylum procedure (ECRE, 2001).

7.3.6 Health

As explained in the previous part of this chapter on the UK, refugees explained that in Kosovo they felt it was not safe to use the Serb-dominated health facilities and, in fact, it has been documented that before and during NATO air campaign there was widespread violation of medical neutrality by Serbs against Kosovar Albanians (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).

People were generally satisfied with the healthcare they received in Italy as many of them received proper care for the first time in years. Those who were still with an uncertain status at the time of the interviews were worried about not being able to complete their treatment before return. Not being able to speak Italian made it more difficult to explain the problems and caused frustration and delays, but overall the experience was a positive one.

Psychological support was much more difficult to obtain, many interviewees had been suffering of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic disorders. These were caused either by the worries about the situation in Kosovo, especially during the height of the crisis when it was difficult to contact relatives and friends while the general news reported abuses, killings and destruction, or by the violence they had faced before escaping.

None of the people I interviewed had received any help for psychological distress at the time of the interview.

7.3.7 Education

The vast majority of the refugees who were studying in Kosovo before leaving, interrupted their studies in Italy, with the exception of children and teenagers that continued their compulsory education in Italian schools. Higher education was not considered a possibility because of its costs, the lack of support and funding, and other priorities dictated by everyday problems.

Ermal finished junior high school (*scuola media*) in Italy and he wanted to continue studying to become a nurse. Originally, he would have liked to go to university and study medicine, but training to become a nurse was a good compromise. However, given the costs involved his family could not afford it.

Those who had finished their study in Kosovo faced several problems in having their diplomas recognised. Arjan was a nurse but he was working in a factory in Italy because the documents certifying that he was qualified to be a nurse were not recognised since they had been issued by the 'Republic of Kosova' which no one recognised as an independent state. Similarly, Drita, who was a student at the University of Pristina, missed the three last exams for her degree, when the university was shut. She continued studying attending the courses set up by the community in private houses and passed her last exams in secret obtaining a degree in Physics and Chemistry. Unfortunately, the documents certifying that she has a degree are stamped in the name of the 'Republic of Kosova' and were not considered valid in Italy. She explained that she was disappointed and disillusioned, since after so many years of study her degree was not recognised, her knowledge was of no use and she had to start from scratch.

"Sono così delusa! Ma ho capito che non posso aspettarmi niente. Però che peccato! Tutti 'sti anni a studiare per una laurea che non vale niente e tutto quello che ho imparato non serve a niente. Ho dovuto cominciare da zero."

Drita (F, 30+, m, arr:1994, factory worker)

She went back to school in Italy attending evening classes for secondary school while working in a factory and, at the time of the interview, she was attending a computer

course.

7.3.8 Employment

Finding a job in Italy was a matter of absolute necessity for all the refugees regardless of their status or time of arrival. This was important even for those who obtained refugee status because despite the fact that they are entitled to the same level of social assistance available to Italian citizens, this is quite low. Working 'in nero', in the black economy is common practice for both Italians and immigrants. The vast majority of the respondents had at some point in their life in Italy worked 'in nero' or were still fully or partially doing so.

The Kosovar Albanian networks were the main way of finding jobs for new arrivals and while people took a wide variety of jobs, they mainly worked in factories or in the construction sector. Women also worked for hotels or restaurants. In the construction sector, some of those who had arrived in the early 1990s were now employing their compatriots or Italians in small businesses of their own, while some of those who worked in factories explained how fast they had managed to achieve higher positions and how they were respected by their bosses because of their hard work. More than one interviewee showed me some keys saying that they were so trusted at work that their boss had given them the keys to the factory. This made them feel proud and respected. They also explained, though, that they were among the few who accepted to work longer hours and at weekends 'fuori busta' (outside the envelope, not included in the official pay slip), meaning that these extra work was done 'in nero', illegally and, therefore, the money for these hours could not go on their official pay slip. They all said that they worked really hard and that their pay and the work conditions were not good, especially in the early days. But they all had the need to work in order to survive in Italy and send money back home to their families and to the community at large. Some of them had been in Italy long enough to master the system and knew who to talk to in order to improve their conditions at work. Many had been in touch with the trade unions that are generally interested and involved in the issues of migrant workers' rights. For example, Floresha, was working for a factory when she got pregnant with her second child and

their employers tried to fire her, so she went to the trade union and managed to stop them.

“Quando sono rimasta incinta lavoravo già per questa fabbrica. Hanno fatto di tutto per mandarmi via, cercavano tutte le scuse. Ma io ho capito, allora sono andata dai sindacati e li ho fermati.” Floresha (F, 40+, m, arr:1998, factory worker)

7.3.9 Gender

In Italy gender relations within the Kosovar Albanian community mirrored the structure of society in the country of origin. Kosovar Albanian men were the first to arrive spontaneously and settle in Italy, while women arrived spontaneously as part of a family or to join other relatives who were already there. None of my respondents knew women who had come to Italy independently, without following their father, husband, brother or fiancé. In many instances the father had left the rest of the family behind with the mother in charge of taking care of the children and the respective sets of parents. The family often came to Italy at a later stage during the 1999 war. This situation was conducive to the maintenance of previously established roles and relations.

Some of the women I interviewed were working in factories or hotels, many others, especially those who arrived in 1999 and had children, did not work and spent most of their day at home to take care of them. These women, lived an isolated life in Italy. By the time of the interviews the Kosovar Albanian television channel RTK began transmission and they spent most of their time at home watching Albanian programmes. With no significant institutional support and spending most of their time in the house, they found learning Italian and establishing a certain degree of independence very difficult. Being unable to speak the language and relying on their husband for everyday tasks, such as going to the supermarket or to the doctor, deprived them of their basic level of independence. They explained this situation saying that there was no need for them to try to learn the language or make contacts outside the family because they felt in a transitory situation waiting to return to Kosovo, however, for some of them this transitory

moment had already lasted two or three years. The possibility of dating or marrying non-Albanians was not even considered by the women I talked to. This can partly be explained by the fact that the vast majority was already in a relationship when they arrived in Italy and the second generation was still too young. However, a small number of single men did admit to having dated Italian girls and a few mixed marriages had already taken place although the majority prefers to marry other Kosovar Albanians. The new generations might bring considerable changes in the future.

7.3.10 Socialising

The majority of the respondents were in touch with other Kosovar Albanians in Italy, some of them had Italian friends and few were also in contact with Albanians from Albania.

The vast majority had different members of their extended family living in Italy in various locations; therefore, visiting each other's houses, meeting at weekends or celebrating together personal, national or religious occasions was common practice. The strong and tight network of people helping the newly arrived ones made it possible for the latter to feel immediately part of a wider community and establish some basic links. Only in a single case the respondent had not met other Kosovar Albanians in Italy and was not in touch with any of them, but this was the case of a refugee who had come here alone and found a job as a shepherd spending three years in total isolation in the country side. During those three years spent alone with the cattle, he explained, he had not had a chance to learn Italian and he joked about the risk of forgetting Albanian as well, so when he finally changed his job he had to start from scratch to build a social network in Italy.

Speaking the language was necessary for establishing relations with Italians and more often than not understanding the local dialect was also required for a good level of communication. Overall, they felt Italians were ignorant about the situation in Kosovo, and despite their efforts to attract public attention to the dramatic situation, Kosovars were largely ignored by the Italian government, the media and the public opinion until the escalation of the conflict in 1998-1999. The widespread racism against Albanians

was initially an obstacle when looking for a job or trying to establish relationships with Italians and they felt they had to work harder to gain trust. Drita said that when she introduced herself as Albanian, people looked scared and had a clearly negative reaction. However, when she started introducing herself as Kosovar it was better, especially after NATO's campaign in Kosovo started.

“Quando mi presentavo e dicevo che ero Albanese mi guardavano male, avevano paura. Una reazione così negativa! Quando poi ho cominciato a dire che sono Kossovara era molto meglio, specialmente dopo che la NATO ha cominciato i bombardamenti.” Drita (F, 30+, m, arr:1994, factory worker)

When the conflict in Kosovo entered the public domain in 1999, the combination of a welcoming government policy and positive press reports influenced people's attitudes in favour of the refugees and the widespread prejudices against Albanians were put aside when dealing with Kosovar Albanians. In order to reconcile the racist stereotype of the Albanian migrant a new stereotype was created: 'Kosovar Albanians are different from Albanians from Albania'. This stereotype has been confirmed in my interviews with government officials, representatives of international organisations and local NGOs in Italy. The general opinion was that Kosovars are an easy group of people to work with because they are hard-working, able to keep away from illegal trafficking, law-abiding and generally well organised. A widespread complaint regarded Albanians instead, accused by many of taking advantage of the situation by pretending to be Kosovars in order to get a permit to stay in Italy, a fact that cannot be proved in any convincing manner. Many of the Kosovars I interviewed said that while they had problems to find a job if they said they were Albanians throughout the 1990s, after 1999, the situation changed because if they specified that they were from Kosovo people reacted with sympathy; being from Kosovo had become a kind of 'guarantee of reliability and trustworthiness'.

Another group of people they interacted with were other Albanians from Albania residing in Italy. This was not an easy relationship as there is a certain distance between the two groups which hold a series of prejudices about each other. Kosovars often joke about the differences that distinguish them from Albanians from Albania. Morozzo della

Rocca (1999) writes that they consider themselves to be like ‘Germans’ compared to their cousins. This opinion is based on a certain stereotype that wants Kosovars to have a better sense of social organisation, to be law-abiding and disciplined workers ‘unlike Albanians’. On the other hand, the journalist (Raxhimi, 1999) claims that “mainland Albanians have the stereotype of Albanians from here (Kosovo) as lousy and cheating, but rich, Kosovars”. A border has separated Albanians and Kosovar Albanians since 1913, with an interruption during the Second World War under the Italian and German occupation (De Rapper, 1998). For more than 80 years, Albanians and Kosovar Albanians have been living in two different states, going through different political, economic and social developments that made them grow apart rather than strengthen some of the points in common such as the language and a common heritage. These differences have influenced their mode of settlement in Italy and, consequently, their interaction. On the one hand, the experience of being part of an ethnic minority during times of repression enabled Albanians in Kosovo to develop strong nationalist feelings and consolidate their struggle to protect and maintain their Albanian cultural identity; on the other hand, being part of Yugoslavia, especially, after the constitution of 1974, gave people in Kosovo the chance to live in a modern society, to be educated in their own language and to get involved in public life activities. Both situations provided them with the experience of self-organisation within Kosovo, whether in order to resist oppression or to govern their autonomy. At the same time these efforts involved the coordination of their transnational network constituted by those who had emigrated throughout the years. These points are the basis of Kosovars’ pride of being Albanians and to their self-definition as educated, organised and disciplined people caring for their culture. Their conditions were generally better off than those of people in Albania, thanks to the better overall economic development in Yugoslavia and to the contributions from the emigrants. These elements contributed to the stereotype that developed in Albania describing them as ‘rich moaners’, as one Albanian I interviewed said:

“I crossed the border once and visited Kosovo with some friends, we saw what they had. They had some land, a house, a tractor. We could not believe they could be so unhappy and complain about not being allowed to

show the Albanian flag on the roof. We had the flag, but it did not give us food to eat.” Dora (F, 30+, s, arr:1991, professional)

The situation of Albanians in Albania was different because they lived in their independent country, however, between 1946 and 1999, the fact that they were an independent country did not save them from facing harsh political and economic problems. Albanians experienced repression from other Albanians, during the communist regime and even in democracy. Internal political, social, economic and regional distinctions (North, Gëgs and South, Tosks) were the sources of several problems that pushed many of them outside of their country during the late 1990s.

These two different contexts experienced by Albanians in Albania and in Kosovo, and the different reasons for their flight, influenced their mode of settlement in Italy and their interaction. The way Kosovar Albanians settled in Italy was influenced by the situation they escaped from in Kosovo. Their life in Italy was mainly oriented to raising awareness of the conflict back home and towards contributing to the cause of their people. They often worked long hours in order to be able to support themselves and their family in Kosovo and had no much time for socialising. For Albanians, the situations they fled from and the negative stereotype they faced in Italy shaped their interest in integrating into Italian society, letting their Albanian identity fade in the background. One of the representatives of the Albanian community in Italy explained that, in the early times, Albanians focused on improving their own personal lives in Italy and avoided contact with other Albanians, unless they knew them directly. They mistrusted other compatriots because they feared they might have been spies working for the regime they had escaped from. Other interviewees confirmed this, one of them said:

“Years ago, we used to say that for every three Albanians in Italy one was a spy. We did not trust each other easily. Today it is different”. Agon (M, 40+, s, arr: 1987, employee)

This phase seems to be over now and Albanians have begun to feel the need to fight together against the negative stereotypes they face in their everyday life in Italy and in defence of the image of Albania.

In the late 1990s, the two communities began to interact more; however, this was mostly at a community level rather than on a personal level.

7.3.11 Community Organisations

As I have already mentioned, the life of Kosovar Albanians in Italy was mainly oriented to raising awareness of the problems back home and to contributing to the cause of their people. Their main interaction with Italian society revolved around their efforts to help Albanians in Kosovo and they organised their community in line with this goal. They organised demonstrations asking for Italy's attention to the sufferance of their people and since 1997 several of them were held outside the Italian Foreign Ministry in Rome. They also participated in a general demonstration of Kosovar Albanians in Geneva on the 29th of April 1998 where their representative presented three main requests:

“[...] to operate urgently in order to stop the massacre, murders, ethnic cleansing and military genocide carried out against unarmed civilians; distinguish between the regime supported by the army and the police acting against civilians and those who are defending their families and homes; to sanction the Serbian regime which is composed and led by war criminals and compensate the Albanians of Kosova and their pacific movement recognising the undeniable right of self-determination.” Mr. Berisha

They also adhered to the general initiative of the Kosovar emigrant community to collect donations of 3% of the salary of each Kosovar working abroad to contribute to the cause. The collection of this fund was ignored by the Italian authorities for a long time, however, after the constitution of the KLA and the suspicions that this money might have gone towards buying weapons, some of the houses of the leaders of the community who were in charge of the fund were raided by the police and they were often accused in political public debates of financing terrorism. Nothing was ever proven. They emphasised during the interviews, that they accepted that a group of conationals wanted to use the money for this purpose rather than keep following Rugova and putting the funding towards the parallel structures of the Albanian community in Kosovo. Even after the war, this

activity has continued and, at the time of the interviews, the Kosovar Albanian diaspora in the world had created UFORK, that had already contributed to the reconstruction of 169 houses in a city near Mitrovica/Mitrovice and of three entire villages.

Their efforts to raise the level of attention towards the conflict in Kosovo in the late 1990s, were also supported by some Albanians in Italy who helped them with the organisation of demonstrations and the care of refugees in 1999. As we already discussed, the Albanian community in Italy is made of both Kosovars and Albanians and, lately, the two groups have overcome some of the initial divisions and interact more frequently at local and national levels. However, some of the differences, which were highlighted earlier, are still creating internal fragmentation and represent an obstacle. The distinction between Gëgs from Southern Albania and Tosks from the North of Albania and Kosovo, which mirrored socio-political divisions within Albania, is a reason for internal segmentation within the Albanian community in Italy. According to De Rapper (1998), in the South, people equate Kosovo with the North and the stereotype of the Kosovars is that of violent and intransigent mountain people, in contrast to the civilised southerners; Northern Albanians instead are closer to Kosovar Albanians because of the language and, in some cases, because of family links across the borders. These distinctions pervade the life of the community in Italy. During a national meeting, organised by the association 'Albanesi in Toscana'⁵ (Albanians in Tuscany) in February 2002, around 20 leaders (Kosovars and Albanians) of local Albanian associations, coming from different parts of Italy, met to discuss about the need of a coordinated effort to improve the life and image of the Albanian community in Italy.

It is interesting to refer to the debate that took place during the meeting, since it summarises the current situation of the community in Italy showing the internal tensions as well as the current efforts towards a common strategy against a widespread Albanophobia. The main objective of the meeting was to set up a structure able to coordinate all the national activities. However, a discussion about the war in Kosovo started abruptly in the very early stage of the meeting. The subject was still very topical and started an animated confrontation between different political positions. The most sensitive point of

⁵The association exists since 1996 and has worked on different issues concerning the integration of Albanians (housing, work, education, health, legal matters) in the Tuscany region.

discussion was the role of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) in the war that raised the tension between Rugova's supporters and Thaqi's supporters and also between Albanian Gegs and Tosks. Time was needed to calm the tone of the debate, to put aside these political differences and to bring the debate back to the main topic of the future of the community in Italy.

The most interesting discussion regarded the tasks of the eventual national organisation. Albanians and Kosovars shared the same concerns but they had different priorities which reflected the differences we have discussed so far in their approach to life in Italy. Albanians were more concerned about improving the image of Albania and Albanian migrants in Italy. At the top of their agenda was: co-ordinated assistance to the Albanian migrants in Italy on housing, work, education, health, legal matters; clear collaboration with the Italian authority in the fight against the prostitution of Albanian women and other illegal activities carried out by some of their compatriots; the promotion of Albanian culture and of Albania as a new tourist location.

Kosovars agreed on the importance of offering assistance to the migrants and refugees in Italy, but prioritised other needs over the fight against the Albanian negative stereotype in Italy such as: helping the reconstruction in Kosovo; organising courses of Albanian language for their children; preserving the national culture through the organisation of cultural activities; organising the celebration of national festivities.

At the end of the meeting it looked as no agreement had been reached on any of the issues listed on the agenda. However, in his conclusion, the chairman stressed that this was a first meeting and that the lively confrontations and discussions were needed before being able to start working effectively together. He declared himself to be optimistic that in the future things would get better. I had the chance to interview some of them after the meeting and they seemed to have learnt a lot from an apparent fruitless meeting from listening to each other's concerns. They confirmed what other interviews had already revealed: by living in Italy the two groups have slowly learned a lot about each other and from each other. On one hand, Albanians understood the tragic persecution and repression their 'cousins' in Kosovo went through and their attachment to their culture and their flag. They also learned from them to be proud of their culture and their

country and this has undoubtedly given them more strength in the fight against racism in Italy. On the other hand, Kosovar Albanians understood that their stereotypes of the Albanians are unfounded and that those very same stereotypes are the ones that create the difficulties and the racism they all face in Italy. They also learned from them to accept their long term permanence in Italy and the importance of integrating within the majority society rather than concentrating most efforts on the situation in Kosovo.

Few initiatives related to some of the issues discussed in the general meeting have taken place. They were organised by local associations, which are often constituted by both Albanians and Kosovar Albanians, since a national concerted effort was still difficult to achieve, and reflected the different interests and priorities of the local associations according to the prevalence of Kosovar Albanians or Albanians within the organisations. For example, in the area around the cities of Treviso and Bassano del Grappa (in the region of Veneto) some Kosovar Albanians set up Albanian language classes for their children and organised, in collaboration with local authorities, the celebration of some of their festivities. In Tuscany, instead, the association 'Albanesi in Toscana' organised a conference on Albania and Albanian culture, an Albanian music concert and an exhibition of historical pictures of Albania to promote the image of their country among Italians.

Nevertheless, divisions and different interests are still prevailing within the community and they are still far from managing a nationally coordinated strategy to improve the life of all Albanians (from Albania and from Kosovo), that will meet all internal needs and expectations and fight racism and prejudices in Italy. Kosovar Albanians, are still more oriented towards working for Kosovo, its reconstruction and the political post-war situation, however, they have recently joined forces with other Albanians working at a common interest of improving the life of the community in Italy. I further examine this change in the last chapter on return.

7.3.12 Summary

Spontaneous Arrivals	Refugees' life in Italy was mainly influenced by the lack of an asylum support system and by the adoption of <i>ad hoc</i> legislation adopted in response to refugee crisis in the Balkans.
Legal Status	We can distinguish between different legal status: asylum seekers and refugees, temporarily protected refugees, family reunion cases and people settling as labour migrants. The kind of legal position people had influenced the specific conditions they faced.
Support and Benefits	Other refugees and NGOs were the main source of help in a country with no support system for refugees. In 1999 Azione Comune became the first attempt to set up a national refugee reception system.
Housing	Housing conditions were generally poor, some refugees had managed to improve them. In some cases landlords were taking advantage of refugees asking for expensive rent. Some of those with a more stable legal and financial situation had managed to rent or buy properties in better conditions.
Italian Language	No support was available for improving Italian language skills. People learned on their own and, often learned to speak the local dialect as well.
Legal Advice	Legal Advice was provided only by NGOs and some municipalities. Azione Comune offered assistance.
Health	Refugees were satisfied with the healthcare received in Italy. No special psychological support was available.
Education	Higher education was not an easy possibility given the costs, the lack of support and funding, and the need to take care of basic everyday needs. Schooling was available to all children.
Employment	Having a job in Italy was indispensable given the lack of support from the state and considering that most refugees settled as labour migrants. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work. Some of the early arrivals have managed to improve their career over the years.
Gender Relations	Men were the first to arrive in Italy, women usually followed their spouse, father or brother at a later stage. Some women worked and experienced some level of independence; many others stayed at home and took care of the family.
Social Life	Refugees were in touch with other Kosovar Albanians, some of them were also in touch with other Albanians. In general, the widespread Italian prejudices against Albanian immigrants were an initial obstacle to socialisation with Italians.
Community Organisations	The activities of the community was oriented towards raising awareness of the problems back home and contribute to the cause. Lately more efforts have been made to improve life standards for Kosovar Albanians in Italy.

TABLE 7.2: Summary of the refugees' experience in Italy

Before passing to the direct comparison of the two settlement contexts in the next section, the Table 7.2 provides a summary of the main features of the experience of

Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy.

7.4 Comparing settlement experiences

Throughout the 1990s Kosovar Albanians fleeing persecution reached spontaneously various EU member states, including the UK and Italy. There they encountered very different asylum/immigration systems and environments which set the context for their settlement. As we have considered in Chapter 6, in the UK the asylum system was more developed than in Italy, but since the early 1990s asylum policies had become increasingly stricter. Two main bills defined three distinct phases which were characterised by different support systems, these were the 1996 and 1999 Asylum and Immigration Acts. Therefore, the time of arrival of Kosovar Albanians determined the kind of support they received as asylum seekers, which was clearly harsher for those who arrived after 1996 and 1999. Overall, having a stable status was crucial to reach a satisfactory level of integration in the UK. The condition of asylum seekers was not only difficult because of the low standard of support received, especially in the late 1990s, but also because it made it extremely hard for the refugees to be able to establish an independent existence and fend for themselves. Being an asylum seeker made finding a stable job (when they were allowed to work), continuing education, getting decent accommodation, improving their skills and extending their social network particularly difficult. Only the refugees who had arrived in the early 1990s had received a stable status (refugee convention status or ILR) by the time of the interview but they had waited on average six to seven years for it. This combined with their personal background and the length of their stay in the UK made them the most integrated group. The others were still waiting for a final decision on their claim when I interviewed them and this added the worry about their future to the general difficulties they faced.

On the contrary, this chapter indicated that in Italy refugees found no institutional support since the country had neither a specific legislation on asylum nor a developed reception and support system for asylum seekers and refugees. Asylum seekers received minimum assistance for the first 45 days and were then left with no support while

having no permission to work. It is not surprising to find that, with the exception of some refugees who received temporary forms of protections with ad hoc legislation, most Kosovar Albanians settled in Italy as labour migrants. Therefore, two main factors contributed to a satisfactory level of integration in Italy: having a job and getting support from NGOs and other Kosovar Albanians.

The analysis of both countries in this chapter indicates that the personal background of each refugee and the time of their departure from the country of origin have a great influence in their ability to relate to the environment they find in the country of exile. These two elements are often connected, given that the ability to flee in a given moment is influenced by the socio-economic resources available to the refugee. Van Hear argues that:

“As the international migration regime has become more stringent, the main factors which determine the ability to reach these destinations have increasingly become cost, connections (or ‘social capital’), and chance. At least the first two of these are shaped by socio-economic standing. (Arguably chance is too, since the better endowed might be said to ‘make their own luck’: i.e. their greater wealth and social capital makes more likely the working of chance to their advantage). It follows that access to more prosperous and desirable destinations will be limited to better resourced migrants.” (Van Hear, 2004)

In his study on conflict, forced migration and class, he refers to Bourdieu’s definition of classes as distinguished by the possession of different forms of capital (economic capital; cultural capital or better, informational capital; social capital, connections and group membership; symbolic capital, the form with which different types of capital are perceived and recognized as legitimate) in different volumes and compositions. He claims that :

“These notions of classes and of different endowments of capital than can be transmitted or converted can be usefully applied to the migration arena. For

in the migration arena, possession of wealth is much of the story, but not the whole story. International migration requires the accumulation or possession of amounts of capital in various combinations: economic/financial capital, cultural/informational capital, and social and human capital.” (Van Hear, 2004)

I argue that even the time of the departure is largely influenced by the kinds of capital available to the refugee. Early anticipatory refugees from Kosovo came mostly from urban areas, had a higher educational and socio-economic background, in contrast acute refugees from Kosovo came mostly from rural areas, were less educated and had a lower socio-economic background. In the UK this distinction was more evident since, given its geographical location, reaching the country independently required more resources; Italy was easier to reach given its geographical position in relation to Kosovo and required less resources making it easier for people from a wider socio-economic spectrum to reach it.

In general, this implied that, despite the fact that all refugees were escaping persecution, it was ‘easier’ to leave Kosovo before events precipitated for those who had better personal and socio-economic conditions (age, health, social class, financial resource). Their personal background also helped them in settling in the country of exile where they could count especially on their cultural and social capitals to make the most out of the system they were confronted with. This does not mean in any way that their experience was not hard and traumatic, their position brought anxiety and stress for the situation in Kosovo and the conditions of those who were left behind and the responsibility to support them. Undoubtedly, these elements exercised a heavy weight on their settlement in Italy or the UK. On the other hand, it was more common that those with lower personal and socio-economic resources left when events precipitated under generally more vulnerable conditions. This included women, children, the elderly, people from rural areas and with low financial possibilities. These often arrived traumatised by the violence and the destruction they witnessed or received before fleeing. Of this group, the elderly and the unskilled, uneducated refugees and those deeply traumatised by the violence in Kosovo had the hardest time in the country of exile.

This group faced better conditions in the UK, where they had some degree of institutional support that provided them with basic care and assistance. In Italy, where working was crucial for survival, this vulnerable groups had a harder time when unable to find enough support through the circle of families, friends and NGOs.

Life in the UK has brought both continuity and change to gender relations. For some women, especially those who arrived alone at a young age, exile in the UK has been an empowering experience thus threatening the traditional equilibrium of gender relations within the community. On the other hand, they were confronted with the limitations and boundaries to their empowerment imposed by the community itself. On the contrary, in Italy, the gender relations that characterised Kosovar Albanian society in Kosovo was mostly reproduced, since women generally followed the rest of the family and recreated the pre-exile set of relations.

Finally, referring to the analysis of refugees' modes of settlement in relation to their attitudes towards the conflict by Joly (2002) and to her typologies distinguishing between Odyssean and Rubicon refugees, I note that both types can be distinguished when analysing Kosovar Albanian refugees as social actors in the UK and Italy. In both countries of exile, those refugees, who were involved in the political struggle in Kosovo shaped their settlement around the cause of Kosovar Albanians in Kosovo while others, who were not politically engaged with the conflict, focused more on improving the conditions of settlement in exile and caring for their relatives at home. However, Kosovar Albanians as a group seem to have had different modes of settlement in the UK and in Italy. In the UK the various community organisations focused their activities towards improving the conditions of Kosovar Albanians in the UK, while much less has been done to raise the profile of the crisis in Kosovo. Despite the fact that individually much effort was made to support the families in Kosovo, the kind of relations the community as whole entertained with the rest of the Kosovar Albanian Diaspora and with the conflict in Kosovo is not clear. Therefore, in the UK they developed a mode of settlement which is closer to Joly's definition of Rubicon refugees. In Italy, instead, most efforts have been focused on bringing the case of the Kosovar Albanians' oppression in Kosovo at the attention of the Italian government and public opinion and contributing to the

running of the Albanian parallel structures in Kosovo before the war and to the reconstruction afterwards. Only recently the community has begun to organise collectively to improve the conditions for Kosovar Albanians in Italy. Therefore, the characteristics of their mode of settlement is closer to Joly's Odyssean type.

Several factors have had an impact on these differences, with the level of political activities and the involvement with the conflict before the flight being one of them. The first refugees to settle and lay the foundation of the community in the UK were very young, with many of them becoming refugees while already being abroad. In contrast, the first arrivals of Kosovar Albanians in Italy were constituted mostly of young men involved in politics, journalists and trade unionists who were persecuted because of their political activities. Another reason is that, in the UK, Kosovar Albanians followed the asylum route which meant that for several years they were asylum seekers and, therefore, unable to visit⁶ Kosovo and maintain direct connection with the place. The geographical distance of the UK from Kosovo plaid its part as well. On the contrary, in Italy, having settled mostly as labour migrants Kosovar Albanians were able to return to Kosovo for quick visits and maintain their relationships with activities on the ground at their own risk. The vicinity of Italy to Kosovo, made these contacts even easier. Moreover, the ability to travel and the geographical position of Italy was congenial to develop the relationship with the largest Kosovar Albanian Diasporas in Europe, in Switzerland and Germany. This was not the case in the UK.

This chapter has highlighted that the personal situation of each refugee, their experience in the country of origin and the time of their flight had an impact on the way they related to the conditions they found in the country of exile. Good material and social resources enabled them to develop more successful survival strategies in order to adjust to the new environment and re-establish their lives.

In the UK, Kosovar Albanians found a structured asylum reception system which provided them with some support but at the same time restricted their actions. The assistance received by asylum seekers offered them immediate minimum support but in the long term, it clearly did not facilitate integration prolonging a state of uncertainty

⁶If asylum seekers return to the country of origin for a visit they lose the right to their claim.

and promoting dependence. On the contrary, in Italy, they were faced with a general lack of structures supporting asylum seekers and immigrants. This made life tougher, especially at the beginning, but at the same time left them more space for action. In both cases the most resourceful refugees had better chances to integrate, either because it was easier for them to understand the system in the UK and they managed to get the best out of it, or because they were more able to cope with the total lack of support in Italy and find alternative ways to support themselves.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis between Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy provides good examples in support of Archer's morphogenetic approach which constitutes the methodological foundation of this research. The study of Kosovar refugees' settlement highlight the fact that they are neither passive objects of immigration and asylum policies, nor are they the sole bearer of responsibilities for their conditions in exile. This research has shown that refugees from Kosovo have entered the country of exile and confronted a system developed by previous interactions between refugees/immigrants, governments, the media, public opinion and the voluntary sector. The way in which they have interacted with the situation they found was influenced by various factors: their personal resources (material and social); their relationship with the conflict; and their experience in the country of origin before the flight. The situation they found in exile had an impact on their life, often redefining what was possible or impossible for them to do. In some cases this had a negative impact on people's lives (i.e. people being unable to continue education or find a job), in other cases it opened new possibilities that they had not even thought about before. One example is that of some Kosovar Albanian women in London who lived through a range of experiences in the UK and acquired a level of independence in exile that was unthinkable in the country of origin. At the same time Kosovar Albanians had an impact on the country of exile just by virtue of being there and representing an issue that needed to be dealt with. For example, the arrival of Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy pushed the government to adopt specific measures to deal with them and the voluntary sector to create the first pilot project, *Azione Comune*, for a coordinated reception for refugees which has now developed into the first national reception system for refugees in Italy, the PNA.

7.5 Conclusions

This chapter dealt with the settlement of Kosovar Albanians in Italy. It provided a short overview of the general approach towards asylum in both countries, referring to asylum policies, media representation and public discourse, voluntary sector and refugee organisations.

Having set the background, it focused on the situation that different waves of Kosovar Albanians found when they arrived and analysed the way in which the environment in the country of exile shaped their settlement. Then it considered the impact of different legal status and asylum support systems on their experience and focused on specific aspects of their lives, health, education, employment, housing, legal advice, language skills, gender relations, socialising and community organisations.

The final section brought the comparison between the reception and settlement of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy to life by highlighting some of the differences between the two exile contexts and explaining the kind of impact they had on refugee integration. Throughout Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, and in the final comparison it is emphasised that personal material, and social resources, the time of the flight, the relationship with the conflict, and the experience before leaving Kosovo had an impact on the way in which refugees interacted with the new environment in the country of exile.

The next chapter deals with the specific case of refugees evacuated to the UK or Italy during the 1999 refugee crisis in Kosovo. The chapter explores the same kind of interaction between refugees and country of exiles within the context of the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme and the special reception schemes set up for the evacuees. The study of the complex relationship between refugees and these two countries of exile within the settlement context provides essential information and analytical tools in order to better understand the issue of return examined in the final chapter.

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Chapter 8

Reception of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and in Italy: the case of evacuated refugees

8.1 Introduction

Having examined the interaction of Kosovar Albanian refugees who arrived spontaneously in the UK and Italy throughout the 1990s, both through anticipatory and acute movements out of Kosovo, this chapter focuses on those refugees who were brought in through the evacuation programme set up by the UNHCR and IOM during the refugee crisis of 1999. The analysis of the issues related to the evacuation programme, in conjunction with the earlier study of the different reasons, timing and modalities of the flight and in comparison with the different context spontaneous refugees faced in Italy and the UK, provides some indispensable keys for understanding the return movements back to Kosovo.

Following the escalation of the conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo in 1998 and NATO's military intervention in 1999, mass refugee movements left the region. People fled in order to escape the immediate violence brought to their doorsteps by the war or because of the direct expulsion at the hand of the Serbian police. They run to safety in

neighbouring countries and, eventually, some of them re-emigrated to a different country either independently or through the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP) set up by the UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) during the refugee crisis of April-May 1999 in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). The severity of the refugee flow required the full attention of the international community and of European states in particular. Initially, the UNHCR proposed a strategy of protection in the region and European Union (EU) member states supported this approach. However, as the refugee humanitarian crisis in the FYROM worsened, it became apparent that evacuation to other countries outside the region was indispensable. Consequently, the UNHCR launched repeated appeals, asking other countries to accept some of the refugees in their territory. Some governments responded by agreeing to offer temporary protection to specific numbers of refugees with the general understanding that they would stay for as long as protection was needed and that return was auspicious once the conflict was finally over (EU Special Council Meeting, 1999). Based on these agreements, IOM organised the humanitarian evacuation of Kosovo Albanian refugees¹, which airlifted people to twenty different countries in Europe and elsewhere including the UK and Italy.

Firstly, this chapter provides a brief overview of the general international response to the refugee crisis and the political discourse about protection in the region and evacuation to third countries in relation to return. Secondly, it analyses the specific response of the UK and Italian governments to the crisis. It focuses on the kind of protection offered to the evacuees and, then, presents an account of the kind of reception set up in both countries for them. The chapter is based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources as well as data collected through interviews with volunteers, service providers and policy makers. It was not possible to verify directly conditions in the reception centres for evacuees from Kosovo because when fieldwork started they had already been closed. In the UK, I interviewed some refugees who had been hosted in the reception centres when they arrived. In Italy it was not possible to get in touch with any of the evacuees who had been hosted in Comiso as the vast majority had already returned to

¹Through the Humanitarian Evacuation programme IOM evacuated around 60,549 Kosovar refugees to 20 different countries in Europe.

Kosovo or moved to other countries when I started the fieldwork. No one, neither the authorities nor other informants, was able to put me in touch with the very few who had remained in Italy.

8.2 The Kosovo refugee crisis in 1999

As explained in Chapter 5, following the failure of the Rambouillet peace talks (January-March 1999), NATO launched air strikes against Yugoslavia with the aim of ending violence in Kosovo (March-June 1999). The strikes began on the 24th of March and continued until June, with action formally suspended on the 10th of June when it was confirmed that Serbian forces had started to withdraw under a peace plan contained in the UN Security Council Resolution 1244. During the bombing, Serbian forces on the ground responded with a vicious campaign against the ethnic Albanian population, expelling some 863,000 from Kosovo, with the large majority of those expelled staying in the region in Albania, the FYROM or Montenegro (FRY). An estimated, additional 590,000 were internally displaced within Kosovo and remained in the province throughout the conflict (OSCE, 1999).

The UNHCR had to set up a complicated operation in order to assist the refugees, facing both practical and diplomatic problems because of the scale of the crisis and the tense political environment.

According to Morris:

“UNHCR found itself engaged in an operation as difficult and complex as any we have faced. Great practical problems of assistance were compounded by major protection problems. Macedonia was reluctant to give asylum. In Montenegro the Kosovan Albanians found a government ready to protect them if it could but were threatened by the presence of Federal security forces. KLA recruitment gathered pace. Many families were separated and the number of missing family members grew. A multitude of practical, protection and political problems had to be addressed in a highly charged political

environment in which the stakes for the governments concerned were very high indeed.” (Morris, 1999, p.15)

The EU states’ preferred solution to the refugee crisis was reception in neighbouring countries, Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro (Van Selm, 2000). Different reasons were provided to support such a decision: firstly, relocation of refugees would have meant indirect support for ethnic cleansing; secondly, the NATO military intervention was meant to have an immediate effect on the government of FRY and, therefore, a quick and easy return of refugees would have been appropriate and feasible; thirdly, it would have been cheaper to provide help and support to the refugees if they remained closer to their homes. The presidency conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs special council meeting that was held on the 7th of April in Luxembourg includes these points:

“The Council agrees that people displaced from Kosovo are in need of effective protection. It is unanimous that such protection should be provided as extensively as possible within the region. Temporary accommodation of displaced persons within the region makes life easier for people in unfamiliar surroundings as a result of cultural and linguistic affinities, while also facilitating their subsequent return home. Long-term admission of Kosovars to countries outside the region, on the other hand, would consolidate their displacement from their homes. That would send the wrong signal to the Serbian regime, on which all forms of pressure must be stepped up to put a stop to displacement of people from Kosovo and make it possible for them to return in safety.” (EU Special Council Meeting, 1999)

However, the high number of refugees crossing the borders every day and the level of emergency in the refugee camps put a strain on neighbouring countries. The ever-rising increase in the refugee population worried especially the government of the FYROM, which feared that the situation could destroy the economy and disrupt the country’s own ethnic balance. In early April, when trains carrying thousands of people begun to arrive in Blace, at the border between Kosovo and Macedonia, the FYROM government panicked and allowed the refugees to cross the borders only on a transit basis, asking for

both the status and the final destination to be clarified before entrance. The government wanted international support and the assurance that some refugees would be relocated abroad (Barutciski and Suhrke, 2002).

In order to deal with this 'crisis within a crisis', in April 1999, the UNHCR launched an appeal calling for the evacuation of refugees from the FYROM and EU states accepted to host quotas of refugees in their territory. These were possibilities that had already been considered in the same presidency conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs special council meeting which acknowledges that:

“The Council recognises that, with numbers of displaced persons swelling daily, it might, for humanitarian reasons and to avoid destabilising individual host countries in the region of origin, prove necessary in the future to afford displaced persons protection and assistance outside their region of origin on a temporary basis.

Any such humanitarian evacuations out of neighbouring area must be based on the voluntary choice of the refugees to be temporarily relocated. In this context, the principle of family unity should also be applied.” (EU Special Council Meeting, 1999)

As a result, by the 9th of June, 80,000 refugees were evacuated to different countries supporting the HEP, organised by the UNHCR and the IOM (OSCE, 1999).

Although politicians agreed with the UNHCR and NGOs that Kosovars undoubtedly qualified for refugee status under the Geneva Convention's definition, all EU states granted people who arrived through the HEP a version of temporary protection (Van Selm, 2000). As indicated earlier, the post-temporary protection phase was mainly expected to lead to voluntary repatriation. As Koser explained:

“An orientation towards repatriation was stated as one of the guiding principles for the overall EU approach to the Kosovo crisis, which explains why the emphasis was on trying to protect Kosovar Albanian 'refugees' locally rather than outside the Balkans area.” (Koser, 2000, p.39)

Moreover, the unconditional and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons was included among NATO’s main demands to President Milosevic in order to stop the strikes. With the bombing campaign over on the 10th of June, return was more or less expected as of July 1999 in many countries. Having eliminated the cause of the conflict that generated refugees, states seemed to gain the ‘right to repatriate people’ on the basis of humanitarian discourses and on the assumption that all refugees want to go back to their country of origin (Amore, 2002a). Given the characteristics of the ethnic conflict in Kosovo, it was assumed outright that return was the wish of all Kosovar Albanian refugees.

Having provided a brief overview of the general approach of the EU member states to the Kosovo refugee crisis of 1999, I now focus on the specific examples of the UK and Italy. Both countries supported the European strategy of ‘protection in the region’ and, eventually, accepted to take part in the HEP. They emphasised return after the war as the ideal solution for the refugees and supported programmes for voluntary assisted repatriation to Kosovo. Before focusing on return we need to take a broader look at the UK and Italy’s general response to the refugee crisis in Kosovo and to the adoption of temporary protection measures for the refugees so as to provide the necessary background for the specific analysis of return programmes in the next chapter.

Here, the following sections, focus on the participation of the two countries in the HEP, the types of temporary protection they adopted for the evacuees and the kind of reception they set up for them starting with the UK first and looking at the Italian case afterwards, before drawing out the most salient points of comparison in the conclusions.

8.3 The UK and the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme

The following section deals with the UK involvement in the refugee crisis in Kosovo in 1999 and analyses the kind of protection the government gave to the refugees who arrived in the national territory in that period; moreover, it describes the Kosovo programme set up to receive the evacuees and explains the possibilities they had when their protection expired.

8.3.1 The UK and the Kosovo refugee crisis of 1999

The British government actively supported NATO's intervention in Kosovo despite the fact that for many years the problems of that area of the Balkans were largely ignored. Chandler claims that: "Kosovo, which initially was of little vital interest to Britain, became so once it was a focus for ethical policy-making" (Chandler, 2002, p.77). He affirms that the government's decision that Kosovo 'mattered' to Britain was not due to the importance of the situation on the ground or public support for refugees who actually received little sympathy when they tried to claim asylum in Britain, but to the aura of moral authority that intervention could bring to the government (Chandler, 2002). However, the decision of NATO to intervene without a United Nations Security Council mandate, which opened various controversies on the legitimacy of the intervention and divided politicians and the public, required a strong argument in support of military action. Few weeks into the war Prime Minister Blair found an effective justification for it: punishing crimes against humanity (Robertson, 2002). This implied that human rights abuses and crimes against civilians became the main focus of the campaign and Kosovar Albanian expellees/refugees clearly gained a more central political role within this frame. Nevertheless, Guild remarks that despite their new diplomatic role, "the question of the refugees did not figure as an important topic during the parliamentary debate on Kosovo. In the third debate, on 20 May, in the context of Foreign Office questions, little reference was made to the humanitarian dimension by reference to the refugees" (Guild, 2000, p.83). In fact, the UK approach to the refugee crisis prioritised reception in the region as a favourite solution to the refugee crisis in Kosovo; the government responded reluctantly to both the UNHCR appeals to evacuate refugees from Macedonia and to the request of the German Presidency of the EU asking member states to offer shelter to evacuees in early April 1999. The Home Secretary Jack Straw stated that the UK had already taken around 10,000 refugees from Kosovo and that they would have accepted some more, but he did not specify a number. He declared: "The Government's aim, in common with that of our European Union partners, has been to ensure that the great majority of refugees are looked after in the region so that they are able to return to their homes when it is safe to do so." (Straw, 1999).

Moreover, he added in an interview: “We have said that we will take some thousands of refugees from the area. We have already taken 10,000 before the war started. [...] We have laid in extensive contingency plans, we have said we will respond to UNHCR requests whenever they were made.” (BBC NEWS, 1999).

However, the number of Kosovar refugees included in this 10,000 was calculated with a ‘quick and rough’ count of the asylum applications from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia which were part of the Home Office backlog. Guild (2000) points out that this generated much confusion about the actual number of refugees from Kosovo admitted in the country because of the bombing campaign and those who had come earlier independently. She explains that the Home Secretary made the distinction between ‘our’ Kosovars, those who had arrived in the UK before NATO’s campaign started and were dealt with more quickly and generously as a result of it, and ‘other’ Kosovars, those who were in Macedonia, Albania or elsewhere waiting to be resettled outside the region. She concludes that like in the Bosnia refugee crisis, the UK administration’s approach to Kosovo determined that:

“On the one hand those brave souls who had managed, notwithstanding the administrative efforts to place obstacles in their way, to get to the UK were then permitted to stay and presented publicly as evidence of the UK’s commitment to the international humanitarian effort. On the other hand, those persons outside the UK seeking to go there were subject to very slow procedures, political commitments which were vague and subject to reinterpretation, coupled with a burst of activity towards the end of the crisis period to permit a number of persons in need of protection into the country.” (Guild, 2000, p.76)

The repeated appeals from the UNHCR to evacuate refugees out of the region were met with silence by the UK administration until the 20th of April 1999 when the Home Secretary announced that the first refugees could be admitted through the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme and the UK promised to take a significant number of people. The first group of 161 evacuees arrived on the 26th of April and, as a consequence of further

pressures from the international community, on the 8th of May the UK were forced to be more specific and promised to take up to 1,000 refugees per week for a total of 5,000 people. The last flight took place in June 1999, the total number of evacuees admitted to the programme was 4,346 and more than half of them arrived during the last ten days of the bombing campaign. Following the line of distinction between ‘our refugees’ and ‘the others’, the government sent officials in Macedonia in order to decide which refugees were going to be evacuated to the UK giving priority to those who already had relatives here. This group constituted 60% of the evacuee population, the rest were people with specific needs like special medical conditions, large families with several children, the elderly and other special cases. Evacuees were flown to the North of England and Scotland to the airports in Leeds, Manchester and Glasgow and were dispersed to various reception centres that had been set up in old structures not in use that were quickly reconverted for the occasion. The general idea was that of placing the evacuees in areas which had an ethnically diverse population but away from London and the South-East. The Refugee Council had recommended that the locations should be selected considering the presence of other refugee and ethnic minority communities, good race relations and the existence of basic services such as language classes and training opportunities for refugees. In practice, the choice of the destinations was determined mostly by the availability of housing facilities (Bloch, 1999). Of the 4,346 refugees evacuated to the UK 42% were between 5 and 18 years of age and 6% were over 60, therefore 48% of the population was constituted by vulnerable categories of people (Refugee Council, 1999a). In the following section, I describe the kind of protection they received in the UK and analyse the consequences of their status.

8.3.2 Temporary protection status for Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK

As explained earlier in this chapter, despite the fact that the international community had recognised that all Kosovar Albanians expelled from Kosovo qualified individually as refugees under the terms of the Geneva Convention, all European Member States decided to grant them temporary forms of protection.

In the UK, some evacuees were actually family reunification cases and were given permission to enter in relation to the status that their relatives had been previously granted. The rest were granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) for twelve months with the understanding that refugees would have returned to Kosovo as soon as conditions allowed them to go back. Jack Straw assured that: “those refugees arriving under the programme who have been granted 12 months leave to enter will not have their stay curtailed. We will, however, actively be establishing arrangements to facilitate the return of those who want to go back to Kosovo before then” (Straw, 1999). Therefore, the general emphasis was on return to Kosovo as soon as possible.

Evacuees received a special form of ELR directly upon arrival which included access to social security benefits in line with UK nationals, the right to work and to temporary accommodation, family reunion, other services, and support to return. This appeared as a preferential treatment compared to the normal procedure other asylum seekers, including the spontaneous arrivals from the FRY, had to go through, which implied long waits and minimum levels of support. Bloch (1999) gives a short account of the parliamentary debate on this point and refers to the analogy used by a politician who described this disparity as the ‘Rolls-Royce’ welcome given to the evacuees from Kosovo in contrast to the ‘rickshaw’ welcome for other asylum seekers. Jack Straw defended this choice saying that the evacuees were undoubtedly escaping from well founded fear of persecution because the HEP was managed by the UNHCR that vetted them, while the ones arriving spontaneously could have made their stories up. However, on the 15th of June he stated that all asylum seekers from the FRY were going to be given ELR regardless of whether they came independently or through the evacuation programme. Nevertheless, the difference between the treatment of refugees from Kosovo and other asylum seekers remained. As a matter of fact, the differences were obvious even at a surface level examination. Smart (2001) summarises the various support systems offered to asylum seekers, including those on the Kosovo programme, during the 1990s in the UK in table 8.1, which is self-explanatory.

The disparity between the different support systems adopted by the British government for asylum seekers and temporarily protected people over the years and the Kosovo

	SUPPORT	ACCOMMODATION
Before 1996	£46.98 cash plus housing benefit and other benefits depending on circumstances.	Private rented accommodation.
1996 - Nov. 1999	Assistance in kind from local authorities (for in country applicants).	Temporary accommodation provided by local authorities.
Dec. 1999 - 2000	£36.54 mostly in vouchers.	Dispersed to temporary accommodation anywhere in the country.
Kosovo Programme	£52.20 cash plus assistance in kind (meals, donations, etc.), housing benefit and other benefits depending on circumstances.	Reception centres assistance to move to rented accommodation

TABLE 8.1: Summary of entitlements for a single adult at equivalent of 2000 rates

Programme, in particular, is evident in this table; however, overall the situation of the refugees from Kosovo with ELR was not that favourable when analysing the implication of their status in the long term. As a matter of fact, while on the one hand, this treatment gave them an advantage as they did not need to present their case or go through the uncertainties other asylum seekers normally faced upon arrival, on the other hand, their ERL was limited to one year and it was made clear to them that there was no guarantee that temporary protection would be extended. This led to a constant level of anxiety about the future as temporary protection created a situation of limbo where people did not feel they could try to rebuild a new life in the UK and worried about having to return to Kosovo under unsafe conditions. Smart notes that the evacuees “complained of the stress of a date hanging over them when the year’s temporary protection would be up” (Smart, 2001, p.75).

Undoubtedly, return was the expected outcome at the end of the ELR period; the government gave the chance to people with ELR to apply for an extension of temporary protection or for refugee status under the general asylum determination procedure. However, as I explain in the following chapter, the fact that as soon as the war ended, the government stated that Kosovo was now a safe place to return to, limited the chances to be granted asylum and people needed to have very strong and detailed cases to stand a chance to obtain refugee status after NATO’s campaign ended. The Refugee Council’s Bulletin reported that:

“The Home Office has made it clear that it is taking a hard line on Kosovars, and that there will be no blanket extension of ELR. As such, everyone will be dealt with on a case by case basis - and good cases will certainly need to be made” (Refugee Council, 2000c).

Considering that from the beginning of the refugee crisis the UNHCR and the international community had recognised that Kosovar Albanians qualified as refugees under the definition of the Geneva Convention, with a different political will and under a more efficient asylum system, evacuees from Kosovo could have been granted refugee status; they could have been handled in a very different way avoiding the uncertainty, anxiety and problems linked to a temporary form of protection.

The issues related to the post-temporary protection phase and the assisted return programme are discussed in more depth in the next chapter; here, the following section provides an overview of the organisation of the reception centres and the conditions refugees faced during their stay in the UK, which provide key background information for understanding their approach towards return analysed in the last chapter.

8.3.3 Refugee reception centres in the UK

Learning from the experience of the Bosnia programme in the early 1990s, the Refugee Council had set up an inter-agency group involving other NGOs (the British Red Cross, the Scottish Refugee Council, Refugee Action and the Refugee Housing Association) with the aim of organising a contingency plan for future emergency refugee crises (Bloch, 1999). This plan, Bloch (1999) explains, provided the framework for the reception of Kosovar Albanian evacuees from Macedonia in the UK in 1999. Initially, the Refugee Council was meant to lead the whole Kosovo programme, however, when the number of refugees began to rise the Home Office decided to take responsibility for the general coordination. The Local Government Agency (LGA) coordinated the local authorities involved in the programme; these were in charge of managing the arrival and reception of the evacuees and offer support under the guidance of other agencies. The Refugee Council coordinated the action of the inter-agency group and provided expertise.

Various initial problems of coordination and communication risked to slowdown the organisation of the programme and in order to avoid the dissemination of wrong information the LGA decided to put together a weekly bulletin with the aim of providing clearer news and information to service providers in local authorities, particularly for the benefit of leading members, management teams and staff in Emergency Planning, Social Services, Housing and Education. Moreover, Refugee Action (1999) produced a document entitled 'Kosovan Refugee Reception Centres: A Practical Guide' which was a manual with detailed information to help organisations and local authorities to set up reception centres for newly arrived Kosovar refugees. The Refugee Council put together a periodic Bulletin 'For Kosovan Programme Support' (the first issue was distributed in February 2000) with the aim of informing both service providers and refugees of the developments of the situation in Kosovo and the legal developments for the stay of the evacuees in the UK.

The reception of the evacuees was organised as follows. Upon arrival, the refugees were met at the airport by a team composed of immigration and local authority officers, health workers, interpreters and Refugee Council representatives. They were dispersed to various reception centres (there were a total of 49) which were set up in old structures not currently in use that were quickly reconverted to function as temporary accommodation. At a later stage, some refugees were moved to smaller accommodations in council flats while others remained in the centres until the end of the Kosovan Programme. The centres provided various services including medical care, family tracing, language courses, social events, advice on finding employment or continuing education, and assistance to return. All children were going to school and youngsters were placed at local colleges to take English language courses. The experience in the centres was generally positive, despite a few problems. For example, many members of staff had been involved in the Bosnia programme and thought that the needs of Kosovar Albanians were going to be the same as those of the Bosnian refugees. In many cases this proved wrong and they needed to learn and readjust as they went along with the programme. A particular problem in the centres for the refugees was access to telephones. Given the criterion used by the government to select people to be evacuated to Britain from Macedonia that gave priority to those who already had relatives in the UK, the majority of the refugees had

the need to contact their families. The need to make phone calls was met in different ways according to the solution provided by the management of the reception centres. In some cases they were given telephones to use whenever they wanted, in other cases they were provided with phone cards and in other centres, which wanted to make sure that people became self-sufficient as soon as possible, they were given a choice between phone cards or food items (Bloch, 1999). In fact, in some of the centres there was a conscious effort to involve the refugees as much as possible in running some of the activities in order to avoid the creation of a sense of passivity and purposelessness among the refugee population. For example in a reception centre in Cumbria, Ulverston, it was agreed before the evacuees even arrived that if there were cooks, teachers and other appropriate professions amongst them self-sufficiency was something that would be encouraged and when the first refugees arrived they got involved with cooking, cleaning, laundry and the planning of the welcome for the following flight. This was welcomed by the evacuees, however, after interviewing refugees in various centres, Smart concludes that:

“There was a general feeling among programme interviewees that reception centres are an ideal way of providing for new arrivals but that it is not good to stay in them for so long. It was acknowledged by the evacuees that a long period in a reception centre created dependency - individuals became used to decisions being made for them and those who moved out into a flat after a long stay in a reception centre found it harder to adjust to fending for themselves than those who had moved out after a short stay.” (Smart, 2001, p.83-84)

The reaction of the locals to the arrival of refugees from Kosovo was exceptionally positive compared to the general hostility against asylum seekers and refugees. The media coverage of the war in Kosovo and the repeated appeals of politicians to be supportive of the Kosovar Albanian population persecuted by Milosevic's regime triggered a more tolerant reaction to the announcement that refugees were going to be dispersed in some specific areas. Generally, people responded to the appeals for donations and, especially, clothing and toys had been collected before the evacuees even arrived. Thompson, in the book describing his experience with Kosovar Albanian refugees in a reception centre in

Manchester, describes also the phenomenon of curious locals passing outside the centre with their camera wanting a glimpse of the refugees. He comments:

“The road outside suddenly became a thoroughfare. Cars full of people, especially families, would drive slowly by with all occupants staring at the centre and anyone who happened to be there. One afternoon, I even saw someone drive up to take photographs. It was sickening voyeurism, but only to be expected in a society dominated by media coverage. Here, in the middle of our community, were representatives of the refugees featured day and night on our TV screens” (Thompson, 2003, p.36)

However, the evacuees had little contact with local people outside the circle of volunteers that helped in the reception centres and the feeling of warm welcome often changed as soon as they moved to independent accommodation where in some cases they even received threats and were harassed by neighbours (Smart, 2001). Moreover, this kind of problems followed the general worry that accompanied refugees when they moved to independent accommodation where they needed to fend for themselves in the absence of the net of continuous support and assistance that was available in the reception centres.

Overall, the refugees were extremely grateful for the welcoming support they found in the centres, but many of them wanted to move out to reach other members of their families who were already living in other parts of the country, mainly in London. The general feeling of gratitude and wish to move on is summarised in the words of Stela who explained that:

“The British people were fantastic, they welcomed us warmly and gave us more than we needed. There was a TV with programmes and news about Kosova. Children were given bicycles and we had cloths and food. Everything we needed. But my children were all in London and they had to travel more than five hours to come to see us. So we decided to move to London after five weeks in ...; People did not want us to go there, they were so nice! They said London is too big and too expensive and not so friendly.

They were right, but going to London for us meant being a family again, all together after nine years!” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

The Kosovo Programme finished operations in July 2000 and this meant that many services specific to evacuees from Kosovo were no longer available and in most cases refugees had to refer to the generic support arrangements that catered for all refugees regardless of their origin. This moment coincided with the end of ELR, the decrease of media attention and popularity of their case, and the insistence from the government that it was time to return. Suddenly, Kosovar refugees got off the ‘Rolls-Royce’ and found themselves on the ‘rickshaw’. This is a relevant point in the analysis of repatriation movements of Kosovar refugees from the UK, as we can see in the next chapter where their options at the end of the one year protection are analysed together with the Explore and Prepare scheme and the Voluntary Assisted Return Programme (VARP) funded by the government to promote return. Before focusing on return though, it is indispensable for the sake of our comparison between the situations of Kosovar Albanian refugees in two different countries of exile, to explain Italy’s response to the 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis in the following section.

8.4 Italy and the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme

This section deals with Italy’s involvement in the refugee crisis in Kosovo in 1999 and the kind of protection the government offered to the refugees who arrived during the crisis, then it focuses on the reception organised in the former NATO military base in Comiso to accommodate over 5,000 evacuees.

8.4.1 Italy and the Kosovo refugee crisis of 1999

During the late 1990s, the arrivals of refugees from Kosovo in Italy increased sharply and by 1998 they were the largest national group of asylum seekers in the country. In March 1999, following the start of NATO’s bombing campaign and the beginning of the acute refugee crisis in the region, the number of Kosovars arriving from Albania to the

southern coast of Italy increased dramatically with hundreds of people smuggled across the Adriatic Sea every night and many losing their lives in the journey. These incidents were reported daily by the media, which brought the gravity of the refugee crisis to everyone's attention. The situation required an immediate response and, initially, the government proposed the evacuation of refugees from Albania and advocated for the need of burden-sharing agreements within the EU framework. The plans for reception were made operational immediately and a centre was set up in the Puglia region. However, this plan was stopped abruptly as the government changed its position in order to support the idea of 'reception in the region' proposed by other EU states. This change in approach was quite sudden and is clearly apparent when looking at the media coverage of that time. While on the 27th of March 1999, newspapers headlines wrote about the intention of the government to send boats to rescue the refugees and evacuate them to safety in Italy², two days later they reported that the new position of the government was promoting assistance in the region³. According to Hein (2000), this change of direction came with the considerations that relocation would have indirectly supported ethnic cleansing and delayed repatriation and that it would have been more cost effective to send help to the region. Moreover, the Albanian government had expressed the wish to keep hosting the refugees in order to prove its solidarity with the Albanians from Kosovo.

On the 30th of March Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema addressed the nation on television. He expressed his worries about the war and talked about Italy's involvement both at a diplomatic and military level. He also launched the Missione Arcobaleno (Rainbow Mission), Italy's humanitarian intervention in the region to help the refugees. In his speech, he asked for the support of the Italian population and, proudly, emphasised that Italy had been the first country to answer to the call for help of the United Nations.

The first aim of the humanitarian mission was that of setting up reception centres

²Il Corriere della Sera, 27th of March 1999: "E' emergenza per i profughi. Si pensa di inviare traghetti per portarli in salvo in Italia" (It is an emergency for the refugees. They are thinking to send ferries to take them to safety in Italy). La Stampa, 27th of March 1999: "Traghetti italiani trasporteranno i profughi dall'Albania in Puglia" (Italian ferries will take the refugees from Albania to Puglia).

³Il Corriere della Sera, 29th of March 1999: Jervolino: assistiamoli li'. Pronte 5 navi per l'emergenza (Jervolino: we will assist them there. Five ships ready for the emergency). La Stampa, 29th of March 1999: Palazzo Chigi: li assisteremo sul territorio albanese (Palazzo Chigi: we will assist them in the Albanian Territory).

in Albania able to host up to 25,000 people. The mission was funded directly from central government, regional governments and private donations. The press strongly supported it and three of the most authoritative Italian journalists, Norberto Bobbio, Indro Montanelli and Eugenio Scalfari launched an official appeal asking for people's contribution to the mission:

“Per aiutare i profughi del Kosovo il governo italiano ha organizzato ‘Mission Arcobaleno’, un intervento umanitario che ha l’obiettivo di alleviare concretamente le sofferenze di un intero popolo. E’ un’azione di pace, un segnale di speranza da sostenere attivamente.”⁴ (Bobbio et al., 1999)

Although Italians were divided on the issue of military intervention in Kosovo, they shared the same concern about the situation of its Albanian population and contributed ‘generously’ to the humanitarian mission, which collected around 129 billion liras (about 64.5 million euros) (Centorrino and Centorrino, 2001). However, in spite of these efforts, the Italian government did not manage to stop the inflow of refugees that kept arriving at the Italian coast daily. Moreover, the crisis in the FYROM opened another front on the refugee crisis. As we have already mentioned, in order to ease the pressure on the FYROM and ensure that refugees had continued access to safety, a Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP) to host them in other countries in Western Europe and overseas was set up by the IOM and the UNHCR.

Italy adhered to the UNHCR’s call and to the HEP in early May and offered relocation for an initial quota of 10,000 refugees. According to Hein (2000) this delay in adhering to the programme can be explained by the fact that by participating in the programme Italy had to recognise that ‘reception in the region’ was not working and that some of the arguments against evacuation could not be maintained. In order to reconcile the initial position of the government with the evacuation of the refugees it was emphasised that their stay in Italy would have been temporary and that the ideal outcome would have been return. It is at this point that the government decided to prepare the former

⁴Translation: In order to help the refugees from Kosovo the Italian government has organised the Rainbow Mission, a humanitarian intervention with the aim of relieve the entire population from their sufferance. It is an action of peace and a sign of hope that needs to be supported actively.

NATO cruise missile base at Comiso, in Sicily, as a temporary shelter for 5,000 people while other refugees would be hosted in other reception centres.

The next section presents an analysis of the reasons for which the vast majority of refugees escaping from Kosovo in 1999 received temporary protection status rather than convention refugee status and the options they had after temporary protection ended. This will enable us to better understand the way in which evacuees in Comiso were dealt with providing relevant information for the analysis of the return schemes set up in Italy and, in general, Kosovar Albanians' approach to return which are dealt with in the next chapter.

8.4.2 Temporary protection status for Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy

As explained in the previous chapter, Italy did not have an adequate legislation on political asylum in order to deal with the Kosovo's refugee crisis of 1998-1999. The legislative instruments available in 1999 were still law n. 39 (1990) and the new law n. 40 (1998). As we have already considered, law n. 39 established only a few minimum standards in relation to the asylum procedure which entitled asylum seekers to minimum assistance while waiting for an answer on their case from the Central Commission. The new law n. 40, had introduced extraordinary measures for humanitarian emergencies in case of conflict, natural disasters and other severe events taking place in non EU states and Art. 18 included a specific provision on temporary protection. In this context, considering that the administrative set-up of the regular determination procedure had neither changed nor improved by the time of the refugee crisis in Kosovo, both the government and NGOs were worried that the system could not be adapted quickly enough to face the challenge of the mass influx of refugees and temporary protection seemed to be an immediate solution to the problem (Hein, 2000). Therefore, in May 1999, in response to the refugee crisis in Kosovo, the government approved a first ministerial decree (Ministerial decree: DPCM 12 May, 1999) introducing temporary protection for people coming from the Balkan areas affected by the war. The decree included from the start a humanitarian residence permit, a work permit and the right to be assisted in

collective centres until 31 December 1999 (Ministerial decree: DPCM 12 May, 1999).

The refugees were offered a choice upon arrival: they could get temporary protection status or submit an individual refugee claim. Obviously, opting for an individual claim was not an appealing option in the short term, as this would have meant going through the problems that came with the normal recognition procedure. In the context of a general emergency situation where decisions need to be taken as fast as possible, refugees faced a serious dilemma. In practical terms, they were asked to choose between a guaranteed level of assistance and rights today and the chance of a full set of civil, social, economic rights in an uncertain possible date in the future. It is not surprising, therefore, that the vast majority of the refugees actually chose temporary protection considering that people in need of immediate refuge are more likely to opt for the faster immediate solution. According to official statistics of the Ministry of Interior, about 18,400 refugees, including the 5,800 hosted in Comiso, had temporary protection status. The number of Kosovars who applied for convention status is not clear because they do not appear as a separate group in the statistics, but are, instead, included in the general group of applicants from the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1999, the general number of asylum applications in Italy was 8,356 and the number of application from the FRY was 4,456 (SISTAN, 2000).

Initially, temporary protection had been granted until the end of December, but considering the poor conditions of the infrastructure and housing in Kosovo, its unstable security situation and its harsh weather conditions during the winter season, the government extended the protection. A second ministerial decree (Ministerial decree: DPCM 30 December 1999) extended temporary protection until the 30th of June 2000. The decree stated that the Ministry of Interior, in agreement with the administrations involved and the UNHCR, and in collaboration with the IOM and other humanitarian associations would promote a campaign to inform the refugees about the possibility to return starting on the 1st of April 2000. It also affirmed that a repatriation programme for the refugees would start on the 1st of July 2000 and end on the 31st of August 2000. The programme would respect the dignity and safety of the refugees and guarantee, whenever possible, support during the reintegration phase (Ministerial decree: DPCM,

1999). The final ministerial decree (Ministrial Decree: DPCM 1 September, 2000) detailed the terms for the cessation of temporary protection. Refugees were offered the opportunity of taking part in assisted repatriation programmes for which they had to register by the 30 September 2000. Those who did not subscribe to the programme would have been 'removed' from the national territory as the law in force prescribed. However, under the pressure of advocacy groups and MPs, the government also included in the decree other options for those refugees who wanted to stay (Commissione Permanente Affari Costituzionali, 2000). It was established that they could apply for a different form of residence permit: they could claim refugee status under the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention; they could ask for a humanitarian residence permit in accordance with decree-law n. 286 (25 July 1998); or they could stay also as labour migrants if they provided all the necessary documentation by the 30 September 2000 to a police headquarters (questura) in order to prove that they had a job and accommodation (Amore, 2002b). Despite the government's general emphasis on return and assisted return programmes, a low number of refugees actually went back. The largest number of returns came from the refugee camp in Comiso, where about 3,000 people left as soon as it was possible. This case was used to prove the success of the political strategy to the refugee crisis and to demonstrate that the promise that refugees would stay only until the conflict was over had been maintained. However, it only represented around 16% of the total number of Kosovar refugees with temporary protection in Italy. Moreover, as we explain in more detail in the next chapter, the refugees of Comiso did not have the chance to take advantage of the assisted repatriation programme set up by the IOM, which only started to operate few months after they had already left. Of the remaining temporary protected Kosovar refugees in Italy, only 444 people returned via the IOM programme, while the rest have either returned independently or have stayed in Italy.

In order to be able to analyse and understand the different approach to return of the evacuees accommodated in the base in Comiso and other temporarily protected Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy in the next chapter, it is necessary to look first at the issues involved in the decision to host the refugees in Comiso, the organisation of the camp and the problems refugees faced while staying there.

8.4.3 The refugee camp in Comiso

The first 5,800 refugees from the HEP were taken to the former NATO missiles base⁵ in Comiso, a town of 30,000 inhabitants in the province of Ragusa in the south-east of Sicily. This was one of the most strategic NATO bases in Europe during the 1980s and attracted numerous protests from non-violent pacifist movements, making Comiso a major point of reference for international peace. The base was eventually dismantled in the early 1990s and since then the problem of reconverting the infrastructures into something useful for the area had been at the top of the local political agenda. Several proposals for the conversion had been discussed throughout the 1990s, but in 1999 no plans had become operational yet.

On the 3rd of April 1999, in response to the refugee crisis in Kosovo, the bishop of the dioceses of Ragusa sent a letter to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior, suggesting that the former NATO base could be an adequate short term reception centre for a certain number of refugees from the Balkans. In this letter the bishop underlined the fact that the base that had originally hosted the families of military personnel was 'crying for revenge' for the ordeals of hundreds of thousands of refugees (Caritas, 2000). It was suggested that hosting the victims of violence and war in the former military base, was the best way to 'redeem' this structure converting it into a symbol of compassion and solidarity.

The government accepted the suggestion of the bishop and, on the 2nd of May, the Minister of Interior Jervolino visited the place and decided that it was an appropriate structure to host the first 5,000 refugees. The reactions of locals to the arrival of thousands of refugees from Kosovo were varied. On the one hand, some people were sympathetic towards the refugees and volunteered to help out; on the other hand, people worried about the impact of the arrival of 5,000 refugees in the area and considered them as a threat to the economy. The main fear was that the refugees would decide to stay and compete for jobs. Although, in 1999, the unemployment rate of the province

⁵On August 7, 1981 it was officially selected as the second European main operating base for Ground Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCM), deployed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in response to the development and deployment of new intercontinental and intermediate range missiles by the Soviet Union.

of Ragusa was 14.5%, the lowest in Sicily with an average of 24.5% and just 3 points above the national rate of 11.4%, there was a general perception that jobs might be at risk (ISTAT, 1999). An indication of the general sentiments was provided by a twelve year old girl interviewed by the local press who said that she was happy that her town was going to offer refuge to so many children in need, but she added that the problem was that there were even adults with them and they would take the jobs of the local adults (Schembri, 1999a).

The mayor of Comiso, tried to reassure the population and declared that it would have been a moral crime not to open the former base to the refugees from Kosovo and that it was their moral duty to welcome and support them (Lauretta, 1999). Two main arguments were put forward by the local politicians to reassure the population: the short duration of the presence of the refugees in Comiso and the plan for reconverting the base. Everyone seemed to agree that the refugees should be in Comiso only temporarily, ranging from the government, the opposition, local authorities to the many NGOs and voluntary associations involved (Schembri, 1999a; Lauretta, 1999). The regional newspaper *La Sicilia* published an article entitled “Che siano i benvenuti, ma non per sempre” (They are welcome, but not forever), which summarises the general approach to the arrival of the refugees as torn between a moral duty to offer solidarity and the fear of having to integrate 5,000 ‘strangers’ in the province (Schembri, 1999a). As for the new conversion of the base, the issue was clearly part of the negotiation between the local authorities and the government. Since 1990, people were waiting for the transformation of the base into something that could benefit the area. The main proposals for the base were the creation of the University of Euro-Mediterranean studies and an airport. In early May, the mayor claimed that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Interior had reassured him about the fact that hosting the refugees would not interfere with or delay any such plans and that repair on the runway had already begun. Moreover, the Prime Minister had sent him a letter saying that the project for the airport and the university were compatible with each other and that the government was supporting them both (Liuzzo, 1999). Finally, it was agreed that the base would host the first 5,000 refugees evacuated from the FYROM and that the regional government of Sicily with

the Dipartimento della Protezione Civile⁶ (Department for Civil Protection) would run the camp in collaboration with Comiso city council and various voluntary associations.

On the 5th of May, the first 500 refugees arrived in Comiso and every day about 200/400 people were flown in reaching a total number of about 5,800. As we explained earlier, they were given the option of either submitting an individual asylum claim or getting temporary protection and they opted for the latter. Although, in theory, the ministerial decree established that temporary protection would apply until the 31st of December 1999, it was implicit that protection would be extended until necessary, at least until the end of the war. Therefore, the duration of their stay in the camp was not clearly established. The representatives of local authorities and voluntary associations that I interviewed expected that the refugees would have remained for at least a year and planned their activities accordingly. The Protezione Civile directing the camp had divided their management in two phases: an initial phase to address the basic needs of the refugees and a second phase to organise more recreational activities and develop small projects oriented towards return. Even voluntary associations had planned various projects that were oriented towards return and better reintegration in Kosovo after the war, such as training to learn new skills (for example a job placement for carpenters to learn new techniques and be able to set up a new business after return, computer training for young people, etc), collection of funding to buy tools to take to Kosovo, etc. However, they never managed to implement any of the projects they had planned because the refugees left the camp very early, and after four months from their arrival the camp was completely empty.

Life in the camp in Comiso was not easy and people faced different problems as we can see in some of the examples below. First of all, the infrastructure had not been used for almost ten years and the updating was far from being completed when they begun to arrive:

- The base is divided in two areas, the Italian part and the American part and the distance between the two areas is two kilometers. About 2,000 refugees were hosted

⁶Il Dipartimento della Protezione Civile is coordinated by the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri and deals with problems related to the protection of people and the national environment during natural catastrophes (earthquakes, vulcano's eruptions, floods, etc.) and other emergency situations.

in the Italian area and the others in the American area. Initially, most services were in the Italian part of the base: public phones, a room with a television with parabolic antenna to follow the news in Albanian, a medical centre⁷, and the office where new documents for the refugees were prepared and issued. This meant that the majority of the refugees had to walk for two kilometers to use these services. Only at a later stage was an internal transport system arranged and some services set up in the other part of the base.

- Two to three families shared the same flat leading to overcrowding. In many cases they lacked basic furniture such as tables or chairs and some accommodations received water for just few hours every day while others had no direct water at all. The organisers seemed to address most of these issues, but the bureaucratic mechanism took a long time before being able to provide a solution. For instance, when the refugees arrived there were no fridges or cookers in the flats, which arrived too late, when the camp was virtually empty at the end of August (Cabibbo, 1999d).

A second source of problems was the organisation and management of the camp which presented difficulties with the issuing of documents, the quality and distribution of food, the distribution of basic supplies, etc., which led to formal protests and complaints from both refugees and volunteers:

- For the first month the refugees could not leave the base because they did not have documents and had to wait for the police to issue some new IDs and their visa. This led to protests from some of the refugees who wanted to leave the camp as soon as possible to reach their families in the North.
- At the beginning the canteen of the camp seemed to work, although there were some problems. The catering service had the capability of preparing up to 3000 meals per day, but the canteen could only seat 300 people at the time. They tried to distribute the meals door to door, but even this did not work very well as

⁷There was a small medical centre in the camp which assured the daily visit of paediatricians and gynaecologists, considering the high number of children (50% of the population) and of pregnant women (around 400). Other doctors with different specialisation came in once a week.

many people did not have tables, chairs or cutlery in their flats. Later it became apparent that the food started to become too scarce and its quality dropped. This was partly due to the increasing number of people in the camp and partly due to the dubious management of supplies. Indeed, following several complaints from refugees and voluntary associations, the cooperative responsible for the catering was later placed under investigation for fraud.

- The chain of communication was not very efficient. Many volunteers lamented that people remained for days with no basic supplies, no clean clothing and underwear, no soap, no shoes, etc. Many people suffered of hypotension, but also scabies and pediculosis because of a combination of low hygienic conditions and the heat, given that the temperature reached 40°C in certain days. Supplies were not missing, but they needed to be selected and catalogued and this process took time. In late June early July, some of the refugees broke into the supply containers over night and began to take the material out by themselves. Newspaper headlines talked about theft and showed pictures of destruction with clothes and boxes all over the floor; the authorities said that there was a general misunderstanding and a lack of communication and some volunteers justified the refugees saying that the waiting time for basic necessary items was far too long and the chain of distribution was disorganised. The looting of the containers continued for a few days reaching disastrous proportions, with about a thousand people grabbing what they could and, unavoidably, causing chaos and destruction. As a consequence, the authorities eventually decided to leave the storage space open and allow everyone to take whatever they wanted.

Most of the activities in the camp were focused on solving these problems and taking care of the basic needs of the refugees. Voluntary associations complained about the fact that all efforts seemed to address only the material needs of the refugees. One of the interviewees said that all the authorities cared about was to provide them with a roof over their head and a meal. In contrast, voluntary associations were more concerned with keeping the refugees busy and starting their training projects. As a matter of fact, the authorities seemed to be of the same opinion, but they wanted to complete the first

part of their plan first. This is supported by the fact that they had commissioned IOM to make a census of the population of the camp to be able to address, in a second phase, their specific needs and their preparation for return. In the refugee camps in Albania, the UNHCR in collaboration with IOM and other international organisations had set up a project to register the refugees and create a database of their data ⁸. In Italy, IOM set up a similar pilot project in collaboration with the national association of the Italian city councils, Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italian (ANCI), to undertake a census of the 5,800 refugees in the camp in Comiso. The aim of the project was that of facilitating the organisation of the refugees in the camp, simplifying family reunification procedures, aiding in the planning of an effective return to Kosovo, and preparing the refugees for the reconstruction of their country and its civil society (IOM, 1999).

Several organisations were involved: the IOM office in Italy, ANCI, the Italian refugee Council (Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati) and the Ministry of Interior. The project developed through different stages, the main steps of which were: the design of a questionnaire in Italian and Albanian; the design of software to record the data that was compatible with the one used for the larger project in Albania; the circulation of information about the project in the camp; the conduct of the interviews and the analysis of the data. The interviews started on the 22nd of June 1999 and were completed on the 21st of July 1999. The research team interviewed 2,049 people which allowed them to collect data for about 4,300 refugees. According to the IOM (IOM, 1999), the data were representative of the entire population in the camp in Comiso and offered an accurate profile of the Kosovar population in general. The data were then analysed by a research team of the University of Wuppertal (Germany). 56.5% of the population in the camp was female and 43.5% male, and each family included an average of 5/6 members, 13% of them were illiterate and the level of education was generally low. 58.2% of the men had a job before the war while 70% of the women were housewives. The survey also found out that 65.1% had friends or families abroad, of which 30% in Germany and 19.8% in Switzerland (IOM, 1999).

⁸The vast majority of the refugees expelled from Kosovo had no documents, either because they had no time to get them before escaping or because the Serbian authorities destroyed them before expelling them.

Although one of the main aims of the project was that of planning a better return and reintegration phase, in the end, it did not serve this purpose because, as explained in the next chapter, the refugees left the camp before the programme of assisted return started to operate.

8.5 Conclusions

According to the international community, the optimal solution to the Kosovo refugee crisis of 1999 was reception in the region, which meant reception close to home in Montenegro, Albania and the FYROM. It was argued that relocation would have indirectly supported ethnic cleansing and delayed repatriation and that assisting the refugees in the region would have been more cost effective. In early April 1999, when the situation deteriorated in the FYROM and it was necessary to evacuate some of the refugees to other countries outside the region, the UNHCR and IOM organised a Humanitarian Evacuation Programme and EU states accepted to host quotas of refugees in their territory. However, despite the fact that Kosovar Albanians undoubtedly qualified for refugee status under the Geneva Convention's definition, all EU states granted them temporary protection (Van Selm, 2000) and maintained the initial orientation towards repatriation by emphasising return as the preferred solution after the end of temporary protection (Koser, 2000).

Within this context, both the UK and Italy had already received and continued to receive spontaneous arrivals of refugees from Kosovo and responded quite late to the appeal of the UNHCR, accepting to host quotas of evacuees only in May 1999. Both countries adopted temporary forms of protections for all the evacuees and some of the spontaneous arrivals. Given the situation of the general national asylum systems, these forms of *ad hoc* protection provided an immediate better kind of support compared to the minimum level of assistance available to other asylum seekers. However, this status was temporary and the phase following the end of protection was intended by government to lead to return. In fact, caught between the public concerns for the desperate situation of Kosovar refugees reported by the media and the national and regional concerns for

the impact of thousand of refugees in the national territory, both governments in the UK and Italy emphasised the fact that refugees would be given shelter for as long as it was needed and that return would have been the ideal final solution for them at the end of temporary protection. Therefore, their reception was based on the assumption that they would return to Kosovo as soon as possible.

The UK set up the Kosovo Programme, a reception system organised for Kosovar evacuees, and the long experience with refugees of the various actors involved proved to be crucial for the success of the programme. Evacuees were spread throughout the country, so that the size of each group was more manageable, the Refugee Council and other specialised agencies, which had long standing experience with refugees, were fully involved in the operations and local authorities were given the necessary support to set up the centres. When problems arose, solutions were relatively fast to arrive and the different bulletin services effectively provided information both to refugees and to the direction of the centres. The main problems begun when refugees moved out of the centres into independent accommodations or when the Kosovo Programme ended and they had to turn to the general national asylum system. People felt disoriented and faced at a later stage some of the main problems many asylum seekers are confronted with immediately upon arrival in the UK.

In Italy, many of the good intentions to help the refugees and prepare them for their eventual return were lost due to the lack of experience with an established asylum system which had an impact on some of the decisions about the reception of evacuees and the organisation of the centre in Comiso. The decision to concentrate more than 5,000 refugees in the same centre alone put the structure and the organisation of the centre under major strain. The situation was made worse by a lack of coordination between the actors involved and a lack or misuse of resources. There were many problems regarding refugees' basic needs and most solutions came when refugees had already started to leave the camp.

This contrast between the two reception systems is evident when analysing the reaction of the refugees to life in the centres in both countries. While in the UK, people were happy with the services provided and were worried about leaving the centre, in Italy

refugees were grateful but generally unhappy about the situation and in some occasions they protested against certain problems they faced. Moreover, in the UK evacuees generally found a better structured support but felt at times that life in the centres created a sense of dependence, while the chaotic situation of the camp in Italy led the evacuees to take the situation in their own hands in different occasions, at times with devastating results for everyone.

Despite these differences, refugees shared common levels of stress and anxiety in both countries given by the worry for the situation back in Kosovo, the need to contact relatives and friends who had previously migrated to the UK or Italy, and, especially, the sense of anxiety about the future and the end of temporary protection. The combination of the experience in the reception centres and the anxiety about the end of protection together with the general situation in Kosovo and in the countries of exile had a major impact on Kosovar Albanians' return movements as I explain in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

Refugees and Return: choices in context

9.1 Introduction

So far in this thesis I have examined Kosovar Albanian refugees' position vis-à-vis the conflict, their flight and their settlement in the country of exile. I have argued that these phases of the exile experience have an impact on refugees' choice with respect to return and are, therefore, important factors to consider when attempting to understand what influences their decision.

In this chapter I complete the picture by examining the conditions in Kosovo from the end of the war until spring 2004, the repatriation policies set up for Kosovar refugees in the UK and in Italy, and the views of the refugees themselves on return. With the entire picture in place I then go on to present the conclusions that can be drawn from this study with respect to what influences the choice to return.

I begin by providing an overview of the conditions of Kosovo from the end of the war until spring 2004 and a summary of the official position and recommendation of the UNHCR, UNMIK and ECRE about refugee repatriation to Kosovo. This places into perspective the position of governments in the countries of exile on Kosovar Albanian repatriation and refugees' concerns about conditions in post-war Kosovo.

Subsequently, I analyse in detail the UK and Italy's repatriation policies and 'voluntary' assisted return programmes for Kosovar Albanians focusing, especially, on the case of temporarily protected refugees who were the main recipients of these programmes. I examine the options they were given at the end of temporary protection, scrutinise their practical implications and provide an account of the opinion on the programmes of the refugees I interviewed in both countries.

With an explanation of the conditions for return in both the country of origin and the countries of exile in place, I then turn my attention to the refugees' views on return. I draw from the interviews with Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy and explore their opinion and their perspectives on the possibility to return to Kosovo within the larger context of the whole exile experience and their relationship with the conflict, their level of integration in exile, the repatriation policies of their country of exile and their personal background.

Finally, I explain the relevance of the findings of the case study to the general debate on the factors that influence the choice to return or remain in the country of exile. This explanation brings together all the pieces of the exile experience, from flight to possible return, and provides a set of conclusions that can inform repatriation research in the more general context.

9.2 Kosovo after the war: June 1999-2004

An understanding of the development of the situation in Kosovo after the war ended and of its future prospects is central to any attempt to explain the return process and, especially, the position of governments in the countries of exile in relation to repatriation and refugees' concerns about conditions in the home country. In order to do so, two main points have to be considered: firstly, the way in which the security and socio-economic conditions and the political situation of the region changed after the war and, secondly, the possible developments for the future. This section deals with the post-conflict situation in Kosovo, highlighting some of the major problems the reconstruction presented and providing a brief overview of the main developments until spring 2004.

Moreover, it provides an account of the official position on return of the two main organisations that are officially involved with refugee issues in Kosovo, the UNHCR and UNMIK, and of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), which represents the views on refugees and asylum issues of more than sixty organisations throughout twenty-five countries all over Europe. These organisations represented a point of reference for governments in countries of exile as they were key sources of information on the situation on the ground that were used within government policy documents when deciding about repatriation issues and attempting to justify policies.

9.2.1 Peace agreement and the UN Resolution 1244

In late April 1999, the resolution of the conflict did not seem at hand despite the fact that a month long bombing campaign had caused severe damage to the infrastructure and the economy of Serbia. The Independent International Commission on Kosovo (2000) explains that at the end of April the question of ‘How are we going to end this war?’ circulated nervously within NATO. There were talks about ground invasion, but eventually the G-7 group of industrialised countries with Russia put together a seven-point peace plan which was accepted by Belgrade in early June. These points were included by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1244 that was passed on the 3rd of June 1999 and demanded the immediate end of violence and repression in Kosovo, the withdrawal from Kosovo of military, police and paramilitary forces, and the demilitarisation of the KLA. Moreover, it also asked for the safe and free return of all refugees and displaced persons, for unimpeded access to Kosovo by humanitarian aid organisations, and encouraged a comprehensive approach to the economic development and stabilisation of the crisis in the region (United Nations Security Council, 1999). While on the one hand, the resolution addressed many of the problems left by the war, on the other hand, it sidestepped the main issue of the status of Kosovo, which originally contributed to the development of the conflict, unanswered and created the basis for further uncertainty about its future. In fact, the text of the resolution includes a strong internal contradiction when calling for a commitment of all member states to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia “Reaffirming the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty and

territorial integrity of the FRY” and, at the same time, for “substantial autonomy and meaningful self-administration for Kosovo” (United Nations Security Council, 1999). Currently, this still represents the biggest challenge for the international community and the main threat to peace, as explained later in this chapter.

9.2.2 The Aftermath of the War

UN Resolution 1244 called for the establishment of an interim administration, to be decided by the Security Council of the United Nations with the aim of ensuring conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all and facilitating a political process to determine Kosovo’s future status. In particular, it established that the Secretary-General appointed a Special Representative to supervise the international civil presence in Kosovo and coordinate its activities with the operations of the military presence (KFOR) which was under the overall command of NATO.

In practical terms, setting up an international civil administration was not an easy task for the UN. The scenario in Kosovo at the end of the war was completely different from any other post-conflict situations the UN had ever been involved with. Usually, they had been given the task to oversee transition of states in their entirety with a mandate limited in time (i.e. this was the case in Mozambique, Cambodia and even Bosnia) but this was not the case in Kosovo (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). The unprecedented situation of administering an ‘autonomous region’ within a country for an unspecified period of time presented the UN with many new challenges and obstacles. Indeed, the problems appeared from the very start if we consider that it took them about two months to recruit enough personnel and set up an administrative apparatus capable to run Kosovo, leaving the province without a civil administration during the first most delicate post-conflict phase. As a matter of fact, the first months after the war were dominated by difficult events: further inter-ethnic tensions, the early massive return of refugees from neighbouring countries¹, the presence of landmines and the general destruction of basic infrastructure.

¹In the months following the war around 800,000 refugees returned. During the peak times there were up to 50,000 refugees returning everyday.

Contrary to the slow start of the UN administrative machine, NATO set up 'Operation Joint Guardian' and authorised the deployment of KFOR troops on the ground on the 10th of June 1999, just a week after the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1244. KFOR troops were deployed on the ground two days later, they established the headquarters in Pristina/Prishtina and divided the area in five zones which were put under the control of different NATO's member states.² The initial lack of a civil administration implied that for the first two months the KFOR had to respond to all sorts of problems beyond security issues as defined by their mandate³. The report of the Independent International Commission on Kosovo highlighted the issue:

"For the first two months there was not much civilian support from either the United Nations or the OSCE. Thus, the task of maintaining law and order, repairing local infrastructure and administering the region fell to the soldiers. They acted as policemen, repaired roads, bridges, and houses, ran prisons and hospitals and performed de-mining operations along major roads." (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000, p.105)

Obviously, this situation created a few problems, since not only was it impossible for the KFOR personnel to focus on their mandate, but they were also often called to device improvised solutions when addressing problems they had not been trained for.

Within this context and in the attempt to fill the political void left by the war, two main Kosovar Albanian polities were competing for the leadership of Kosovo. These were the parallel government of Ibrahim Rugova, and the self-proclaimed Provisional Government of Kosova⁴ (PGK) of Hashim Thaqi. In fact, Rugova's government, who

²The Mitrovica/Mitrovice area, in the North, was under the control of France; the South, the area around Prizren/Prizren, was under the control of Germany. The area around Pec/Peja in the West was Italy's responsibility and the central area of Pristina/Prishtina was controlled by the UK, while the Eastern region around Gnjilane/Gjiljan was under the control of the US

³KFOR's mandate included: Establish and maintain a secure environment for all citizens of Kosovo, contribute to a secure environment for the international civil implementation presence, other agencies and NGOs, and control the borders of FRY in Kosovo with Albania and FYROM until the arrival of the civilian UN mission.

⁴The PGK was created by an agreement between all the major political parties of Kosova, Democratic League of Kosovo, Kosova Liberation Army, the Democratic United Movement and the representative of the Independents. This agreement was signed in Rambouillet France on February 23, 1999 by Dr. Rugova, for the LDK, Mr. Hashim Thaqi for the KLA, Dr. Rexhep Qosja for the UDM, and Mr. Veton Surroi for the Independents. It was established in exile on 2 April 1999 during the second week of NATO bombing.

was elected as President of Kosovo by an unofficial Albanian electorate in 1992 and 1998, was still in existence when the war ended, but remained mostly behind the scenes while the PGK, which had been constituted in March 1999 during the Rambouillet talks, established its authority. The latter had planned its future role during NATO's bombing campaign, including the establishment of local authorities and the organisation of a police force. Therefore, it was in a position to establish these authorities within days of the entry of KFOR troops into Kosovo. The PGK expected full recognition as a partner of the international community, but this was not the case. The UN objected to its legitimacy and on the 15th of December 1999 an agreement was reached between the UN, Thaqi's party of Democratic Progress of Kosovo (DPK) and other Kosovar Albanian parties which led to the abolition of the provisional government (and all other parallel structures such as the office of the 'president' held by Ibrahim Rugova), replacing it with a common Interim Administrative Council (IAC) and an executive Joint Interim Administrative Structure (JIAS) (International Crisis Group, 2000). This situation was generally accepted, but left many Kosovar Albanians disappointed as the decision to establish an interim UN-led administration was seen as an external imposition (Blumi, 2002). This decision together with some of UNMIK's failures in the reconstruction of Kosovo and the unresolved problem of its future status undermined people's trust in the aims and doings of international organisations in Kosovo with consequences for the reconstruction process.

Undoubtedly, while the past five years have seen some positive developments in Kosovo and some of the problems have been successfully tackled, many others have not been solved yet and new ones now trouble the area⁵. Moreover, despite all efforts, recurrent tensions between the Serbian and Albanian population indicate how frail the political situation still is and the pending question of the future status of Kosovo keeps dominating the debate and overshadows much of the progress made so far. Below is a short account of the problems tackled by the international administration in Kosovo and a general evaluation of the achievements and problems related to the reconstruction of its physical and administrative infrastructures.

⁵A new problem Kosovo faces is the increasing trafficking of human beings since it has become both a destination and transit point for trafficking of women and girls for prostitution.

9.2.3 UNMIK's challenges and solutions

The UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) Bernard Kouchner⁶ was finally appointed on the 2nd of July 1999 and assumed his duties on the 15th of the same month. UNMIK administration faced a long list of problems from the very beginning of its activities. There were security and safety problems, given the risks of mined land and the reversed unstable interethnic tensions with revenge attacks from Kosovar Albanians on Serbs, Romas, other minorities and other Albanians suspected to have been collaborators of the regime. There were tensions at the borders with Macedonia and Serbia. There were basic problems with the reconstruction of both public and private infrastructures indispensable for re-establishing normal everyday life activities. Moreover, there was the issue of rebuilding civil society and planning the political future of Kosovo which presented a fundamental challenge for the reconstruction machine. Finally, given the situation established by resolution 1244, a further major problem emerged in the post-conflict reconstruction: the future status of Kosovo.

All these issues were extremely important for refugees in two different phases: firstly, when taking a decision about return and, secondly, when having to face these problems upon return. At the same time the return of refugees had an impact on all these issues, as returnees could either put a strain on the poor remaining infrastructure, delaying the reconstruction and the efforts of rebuilding a peaceful civil society, or contribute towards its development. The summary of the main developments in Kosovo over the past five years provided below offers a basis for understanding the conditions in the country of origin that might have had and still have an impact on the refugees' decision to return.

9.2.3.1 Infrastructures

Major efforts have been done to rebuild the physical infrastructure of Kosovo. UNMIK has supported the reconstruction of domestic accommodations, which were mostly rebuilt by people themselves, and has begun re-establishing civic structures like the police,

⁶The following SRSGs have been Hans Haekerrup, Michael Steiner and Harri Holkeri. The current SRGS is Søren Jessen-Petersen.

the judiciary⁷, the legal system, etc. Overall, water, electricity and heating supplies have improved greatly but are still not fully reliable. Most schools and hospitals have been reactivated, but facilities are generally basic. For example, the capacity of laboratories and x-ray departments in hospitals is limited. An international postal service is now operating, the telephone network (including mobile telephones) has been expanded and transportation is improving. Despite the fact that much progress has been made in all aspects of Kosovo's physical infrastructure, the general situation has not fully recovered and more work and efforts are required. However, given the general improvements, the focus of the work of the international community has shifted on institution building which presents a much bigger challenge.

UNMIK is in charge of the civil administration while the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is responsible for democratisation and institution-building. Their aim is that of transferring power to provisional self-governing institutions, pending a political settlement. In order to do this, having dismissed the PGK and all other parallel political structures that existed after the war, the first task was that of actually setting up provisional self-governing institutions.

There have been three elections in Kosovo, the Municipal Assembly in October 2000 and 2002, and the Kosovo Assembly in November 2001, and three main political parties confronted each other, the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK), the Democratic Party of Kosova (DPK) and the Alliance for the Future of Kosova. There has been considerable tension between the LDK and DPK at particular moments and this manifested itself in violence in the run up to the municipal elections in 2000. However, Kosovo's second municipal elections in 2002 were considered to be within 'European standards' despite the murder of the LDK mayor in Suva Reka/Suhareke and the several attacks on senior LDK members (some of which were connected to the trial of some ex-KLA members). In both elections the LDK scored a victory as it did in the elections for the Kosovo Assembly in 2001 where the party obtained 46% of the vote. Nevertheless, this was not enough to secure an overall majority and forced the LDK to enter a coalition with the other

⁷UNMIK has devoted much attention to the reestablishment of an independent judicial system. They have faced several difficulties given the general climate of revenge which made it harder to recruit impartial personnel. Moreover, there have also been concerns that members of the judiciary could be subject to intimidation and harassment.

political parties. After four months of negotiations and political wrangling an agreement was reached with the DPK and two smaller parties (Alliance for the Future of Kosovo and Motherland). Ibrahim Rugova of the LDK was chosen as President of Kosovo, Bajram Rexhepi⁸ of the DPK was elected prime minister. Therefore, on the 4th of March 2002 the Assembly approved the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG). This was seen as a considerable step forward to transfer authority from UNMIK to Kosovo's elected representatives. However, according to the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self Government⁹ signed by SRSG Hans Haekkerup in May 2001, the UN retained the final say in most important legislative matters and the new institutions are not allowed to declare independence. The next parliamentary elections have been scheduled by the United Nations SRSG on the 23rd of October 2004.

Although some progress has been made towards transferring responsibilities from UNMIK to local authorities, there are still important issues to be resolved on this matter. Firstly, more efforts are required in order to establish representative and functioning institutions. In fact, the UN are concerned with the possible formation of separate, mono-ethnic administrative institutions, which would represent an obstacle for the creation of a multi-ethnic Kosovo. They also consider violence against minorities and attempts to discourage minority participation in public life as a major obstacle. Secondly, the handover of power enhances tensions between the Kosovar Albanian and the Serbian communities. In fact, while the former welcome the transfer of power as an opportunity to expand autonomy, the latter see it as the beginning of a slide towards the independence of Kosovo in which they would have little or no power at all. Thirdly, there is a lack of qualified people able to take over responsibilities within institutions as it is proved by the common failures to carry out satisfactorily the tasks already transferred. Even Prime Minister Bjaram Rexhepi has admitted that his government lacks a clear strategy for taking over responsibilities of UNMIK. Finally, there is the problem of the impact of the international community on the recruitment of personnel. In fact, it is

⁸Bajram Rexhepi is regarded as a moderate within the DPK led by former KLA guerrilla leader Hashim Thaqi.

⁹The Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self Government establishes the legal structure for the PISG and the Assembly. Chapter 5 of the constitution lists the competencies which were transferred to the PISG after the general elections. UNMIK retained control of the Competencies listed in chapter 8, which include foreign affairs, monetary policy, justice and public order, and retained a veto over any measures that appear to violate UNSCR 1244.

hard to find motivated people to work for the provisional Kosovar government when an employee working for an international organisation earns twice the average government salary (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 2004).

Overall, over the past five years, undeniable progress have been made in Kosovo's post-war reconstruction. The conditions of the physical infrastructures of the country have now improved considerably, though they have not recovered completely from the destruction caused by the war. The PISG and local municipalities have now taken on some of the administrative tasks, although their activities are limited by two main obstacles, UNMIK retention of powers in many important areas as well as their own level of inefficiency in many of the areas under their control. Despite the work and the efforts in these areas, three major problems are still haunting Kosovo's reconstruction, its development and, above all, peace: the economic situation, the level of security and the future status of Kosovo.

9.2.3.2 Economy

Kosovo has one of the highest rates of unemployment in South Eastern Europe and more than half of its people are living in poverty. The average salary of those who are working is 200 Euros per month. According to official statistics the unemployment rate is around 57% and more than 70% of the youth aged 16-24 are unemployed (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 2004). People of over 70 years old are given a pension which amounts to only about £10 per month. For those who have a job, there is no minimum wage and, with the exception of those paid by international organisations, wages are often paid with delay. Although there were some strikes in 2002, however, the situation offers little space for negotiation by labour organisations. Kosovo is still one of the poorest regions in Europe. The economy was reduced to near collapse by 10 years of deliberate neglect from Belgrade and the situation after the war was desperate. Before the conflict the agrarian sector had a major role in the economy and today it continues to provide support for a large percentage of the population. Similarly, another central contribution to the economy before the war was represented by the remittances from relatives abroad which continue to be a very important source of income today. The

main industries such as mining, metallurgy and related manufacturing enterprises, have not yet recovered since they were based around the Trepca mine complex which is now inactive (UK Country Information & Policy Unit, 2004). Currently, the economy is still dominated by the presence of international organisations and hundreds of NGOs that offer relatively high salaries to their paid staff.

9.2.3.3 Internal security

A combination of KFOR troops, UNMIK civilian police and local Kosovo Police Service (KPS) officers is in charge of security in Kosovo. Over the past five years the situation has remained generally tense; violence against ethnic minorities, suspected Albanian collaborators of the regime, politicians and journalists has been a constant of Kosovo's life with moments of intensified conflict at the border with the FYROM (especially in 2001) and in the Mitrovica/Mitrovice¹⁰ area at the border with Serbia (especially in 2004).

Generally, the number of killings had begun to decrease between the year 2000 and 2003¹¹, with most attacks on Serbs and other minorities held to be ethnically motivated while the majority of the attacks on Albanians assumed to be due to family and economic rivalries, criminal activities or politics. However, in spring 2004 the situation exploded again during the ethnic unrest that took place between the 17th and the 19th of March 2004 in northern Mitrovica/Mitrovice triggered by two incidents amplified in the media: the shooting of a young Kosovar Serb in the village of Caglavica (in the area around Pristina/Prishtina) on the 15th of March, which led to a blockade by Kosovo Serbs of the main Pristina-Skopje road just outside Pristina/Prishtina, and the death of at least two Kosovar Albanian children by drowning in the River Ibar near the town of Zubin Potok (Mitrovica/Mitrovice region) on the 16th (UN Secretary-General, 2004).

The clashes following these events represented a serious setback to the stabilisation and

¹⁰The city is divided by the river Ibar and, until March 2004, 2,000 Albanians and 9,000 Serbs lived in the north bank, which was controlled by the latter, and more than 90,000 ethnic Albanians lived in and controlled the south side.

¹¹During the year 2000 245 civilians were killed, in 2001 a total of 136 and in 2002, a total of 68 (60 ethnic Albanians, 6 ethnic Serbs and 2 of unknown ethnicity). In 2003, there were 72 murders (17 from ethnic minorities, of whom 13 were Serb and 4 of unknown ethnicity. 7 of the Serb murders were held to be ethnically motivated).

normalisation of Kosovo. During the clashes, 20 people lost their lives, both Kosovar Albanians and Serbs, over 900 persons were injured, around 700 houses belonging to minorities, mostly Kosovar Serbs, and 36 Orthodox churches, monasteries and other religious and cultural sites were damaged or destroyed. Some public facilities such as schools and health clinics were damaged as well. In addition, more than 4,000 individuals from various ethnic minorities, mostly Kosovar Serbs, were forcibly displaced within the region or sought refuge in Serbia/Montenegro or other destinations. Violence was also directed at UNMIK and KFOR forces and 65 international police officers, 58 KPS officers and 61 personnel of the KFOR suffered injuries.

Therefore, the clashes did not only harm the relations between Serbs and Albanians even further, but also raised new issues about the safety of the personnel of international organisations in Kosovo and uncovered the widespread disappointment and resentment that part of the population had developed towards them. Moreover, the work they had done in the past five years was put under scrutiny. Analysts attributed blame to the international community for not having resolved the question of the status of Kosovo leaving it more in a state of prolonged ceasefire rather than peace. It was argued that delays in the talks about the future of the region not only invited more unrest in Kosovo, but also increased nationalist sentiments in Serbia¹² (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 2004).

9.2.3.4 The future status of Kosovo

The unresolved question of the status of Kosovo has remained the main concern of the entire population of Kosovo, Serbia and the international community. The events of March 2004 were almost expected by those who knew and experienced the problems left by this unsolved matter.

As explained earlier in this chapter, officially Kosovo is still part of the state of Serbia and Montenegro as an autonomous province, despite the fact that in practice it already

¹²The Serbs in Serbia as well as in Kosovo harshly criticised the failure of UNMIK and KFOR to protect the Serb population in Kosovo. Especially the removal of control posts was a reason for concern, and at the funeral of a murdered Serb in June 2004 separate roads for Serbs from and to their enclaves in Kosovo, were demanded.

has a *de facto* independence from Serbia. Obviously, discussing about this issue seems to bring the clock back to the early 1980s controversies about Kosovo's level of autonomy and possible independence, right where it all started. The Serbian government is a firm supporter of keeping Kosovo within the Serbian state, while the vast majority of Kosovar Albanians aspire to independence or union with Albania.

According to the Independent International Commission on Kosovo (2000) there are five possibilities under discussion for the future of Kosovo: protectorate, partition, independence, conditional independence and autonomy within a democratic FRY. A protectorate, would mean the continuation of the current situation with UNMIK's administration remaining in Kosovo for an indefinite length of time. Partition, would imply the full acceptance that the Serbian people have a historical claim to continue to live in Kosovo but that it is impossible to think about Albanians and Serbs living in the same country. In few words, a partition negotiated between the Serbian authorities in Belgrade and the international community would ratify the *de facto* ethnic division of the province that has emerged since June 1999. Independence would finally meet the demands of the Kosovar Albanian majority and put an end to the UN protectorate, but would raise the fears that an independent Kosovo would trigger a chain reaction of demands from Albanians in Macedonia, Montenegro and southern Serbia to join a Greater Albania (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). Furthermore, ethnic minorities in Kosovo are concerned that independence would be followed by their expulsion. Conditional independence is a solution based on the consideration that even after achieving independence, some supervisory international presence would be required at both administrative and military level to protect minorities. Finally, autonomy within a democratic FRY, which seems to be by far the preferred solution of many international players, assumes that Albanians, Serbs and other minorities which have been at war with each other for over ten years, can one day live peacefully within the same state. None of these options can be easily accepted by all parties involved and this makes achieving a solution all the more tense and politically charged. On the one hand, Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica has recently claimed to prefer the idea of partition of Kosovo in order to ensure autonomy and security for the Serbian minority. On the other hand, both the Albanian leadership and UNMIK have rejected this solution considering

an ethnically based partition unacceptable. Moreover, the plan would be difficult to implement since the Serbs live in several enclaves scattered across Kosovo and separating the Serb dominated northern part from the rest would also involve the partition of the valuable mines of the Mitrovica/Mitrovice area. The parties that represent Serbian interests in Kosovo, of which the largest is the Coalition Returning, want to keep Kosovo in the Union State of Serbia and Montenegro. Overall, calls for independence shake the international community since they fear further regional disintegration, political instability and possible eruption of violence. All Kosovar Albanian parties, including the LDK and the PDK, representing Kosovo's more than 90% Albanian majority, are in favour of independence. Kosovo's Prime Minister Rexhepi said that if the international community does not make clear progress on the matter, his government might call for a referendum on independence (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, 2004).

In 2002, SRSG Steiner introduced the formula 'standards before status'¹³, this meant that certain established standards must be fulfilled in Kosovo before the start of the process for determining its status. Kosovar Albanians were disappointed once again, as they would have preferred to discuss about 'status before standards', leaders were especially worried about the lack of a specific time frame for these conditions to be reached.

After the 2004 clashes, SRSG Harri Holkeri and Ibrahim Rugova launched the Kosovo Standards Implementation Plan which is a detailed policy plan indicating ways to achieve the goals set by the standards. It was also established that if the standards will be met by mid-2005, negotiations about Kosovo's status could begin. This could be the beginning of a real solution or the start of further clashes considering that, on the one hand, the Serbs worry that the achievement of standards and the deadline means that independence is inevitable while, on the other hand, Kosovar Albanians, seem satisfied about the fact that a date has finally been set. The future of Kosovo is still uncertain.

Having explained some of the progress and the problems of post-war Kosovo, I provide next a summary of the official position and recommendations on refugee repatriation of

¹³The standards are those laid down in UN Resolution 1244: the rule of law, freedom of movement, the return of refugees, functioning democratic institutions, economic progress, protection of private property, normalisation of relations with Belgrade and a properly constituted Kosovo Protection Corps.

the UNHCR, UNMIK and ECRE.

9.2.4 UNHCR's position on return

The UNHCR produced regular position papers and recommendations on return and on the continued need of protection for all refugees from Kosovo. The first official document was produced in October 1999 and was entitled 'Kosovo Albanians in Asylum Country: UNCHR Recommendations as Regards Returns'. It explained that given the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces and the deployment of KFOR forces into Kosovo in mid-June 1999 the situation inside Kosovo for ethnic Albanians had improved considerably. Moreover, as of the 30th of July 1999, over 90% of the Kosovar Albanians who had fled the province earlier in 1998 and 1999 had already returned. It was, therefore, concluded by the UNHCR that in these circumstances, the majority of asylum claims submitted by Kosovar Albanians who left the province after July 1999 were not based on a well-founded fear of persecution as defined in the 1951 Convention (UNHCR, 1999).

This provided governments with a good basis for considering Kosovo a safe place for Kosovar Albanians and grounds for proceeding with repatriation or deportation of refugees disregarding the rest of the recommendations listed in the document. However, the position paper clarified that the situation was still 'violent and insecure', for both Kosovar Albanians and other ethnic groups, and that the massive early returns were not an indication of a safe situation on the ground but were caused by the poor conditions in which refugees were living in neighbouring countries, their fear that others might occupy their properties in their absence and the need to trace missing family members left behind in Kosovo.

The document also specified that particular cases may still have been in need of protection, such as mixed families and people of mixed ethnic origin; draft age males who refused to participate in KLA military activities; those accused of collaborating with the Serbian or Yugoslavian forces¹⁴. The UNHCR also recommended that the special needs

¹⁴The grounds upon which a person might have been accused to be a collaborator were not necessarily always based on reality. The fact that a person's house had not been burned or looted by Serbian or Yugoslav forces was considered as a good prove. It was then possible for a person who had nothing to do with the Serbian regime to fall victim.

of some specific categories of particularly vulnerable people should be taken into account in the context of return, even if they left Kosovo after the end of the war in mid-June. The examples listed in the document are: the (unaccompanied) elderly; unaccompanied minors; the handicapped and ill; traumatised individuals; female single heads of households (especially those without relatives in Kosovo). The final conclusion of this 1999 document was that well-founded fear of persecution for Convention reasons might have still existed for Kosovar Albanians in Kosovo and, therefore, they should be given access to status determination procedures and have their claims carefully and individually considered. The document stated that given the circumstances, cessation of refugee status for Kosovar Albanian refugees was not possible and recommended that for temporarily protected people the possible withdrawal of protection should not lead to persons being involuntarily returned in an indiscriminate manner. Even in those cases in which people expressed their wish to return the organisation recommended that the time of returns should be carefully planned, taking into account both personal circumstances and the conditions on the ground in Kosovo. This included problems with the infrastructure and security issues such as: the availability of adequate shelter, food and other provision for basic needs; the functioning of health care and social services; the presence and effectiveness of police or other security forces; the level of violence prevalent in the province.

The situation was reviewed every year and similar documents were prepared in 2000¹⁵ (UNHCR, 2000), 2001 (UNHCR, 2001), 2002 (UNHCR, 2002) and 2003 (UNHCR, 2003). They reaffirmed that while most Kosovar Albanians were unlikely to face protection problems, there were specific categories of Kosovar Albanians who may have faced serious protection risks, including physical danger, if they returned home. The categories were still the same: those who originated from areas where they constitute an ethnic minority, those in mixed marriages, persons of mixed ethnicity and persons perceived to have been associated with the Serbian Regime after 1990. Once more, the UNHCR urged that states continued to provide international protection for Kosovars who had suffered particularly serious and traumatising experiences.

¹⁵Two categories were added to the same groups described in the 1999 position paper for the year 2000: those who were outspokenly critical of the former KLA or the PGK and members or supporters of political parties not aligned with the KLA or the PGK.

The final update of the position paper on continued protection needs was produced in August 2004 and reflected the problems following the clashes that took place in March of the same year. The UNHCR confirmed all the recommendations of the previous papers reaffirming that all minorities were still at risk of persecution, that particular groups of Kosovar Albanians had serious reasons for fearing persecution and that vulnerable groups of people should not be forced to return. Moreover, it claimed that given the violence that had erupted in March:

“[...]forced or compelled returns of members of Serb, Roma, Ashkaelia, Egyptian and Kosovo Albanian minority communities should not take place. In addition to placing these persons in serious jeopardy, such returns could contribute to further destabilize the situation in Kosovo thus placing this environment at risk of new or increased inter-ethnic violence and renewed displacement. This risk is even higher where individuals may be forcibly returned to displacement into minority communities outside their place of origin.” (UNHCR, 2004, p.8)

The UNHCR has monitored the evolution of the situation for potential returnees in Kosovo over the past five years and has issued clear recommendations to host countries about repatriation. All the reports, year after year, described a similar picture: the situation for Kosovar Albanians in Kosovo had improved since the end of the war in 1999, however, it remained quite unstable and fragile. Therefore, the organisation recommended that not only ethnic minorities but also specific categories of Kosovar Albanians should not be forced to return and their asylum claims should be given the right amount of attention. Moreover, specific groups of vulnerable people should be given the opportunity to remain in exile as long as the infrastructure in Kosovo could not provide them with the necessary support. However, as discussed later in this chapter, European governments seemed to have listened only to the first point and forced repatriation of Kosovar Albanians was a regular feature of the post-war years.

9.2.5 UNMIK's position on return

UNMIK's main concerns with regard to Kosovar Albanian refugees were related to the conditions returnees would find in Kosovo and the impact of their return on all aspects of the reconstruction and development of the region: housing, social assistance, the provision of health care, policing and education.

In 2001, UNMIK prepared a briefing note to explain the situation found by those Kosovar Albanians who had already returned by April 2001 and listed the possible problems for the future. The document explains that despite the limited absorption capacity and shattered infrastructure in Kosovo, those Kosovar Albanians who had already returned had generally managed to find accommodation either in their original homes or with friends and relatives. However, it stresses that given the high numbers of returnees who had arrived over the past year, shelter possibilities were by then largely exhausted. The return of Kosovars without a house or a strong family or community support was considered as counterproductive to the ongoing reconstruction and had the potential to reverse the progress thus far made.

Moreover, in the briefing note, the conditions of the health care system were also considered in relation to return. It explains that, by April 2001, the health services in Kosovo had recovered substantially but were unable to offer satisfactory care for complicated treatments or conditions requiring long-term care (i.e. cancer, all heart surgery, severe and chronic mental illness and psycho-social disorders, HIV/AIDS). The document recommended that refugees treated for diseases that required intensive, complicated or sophisticated procedures should be given the opportunity to complete their treatment before returning to Kosovo and that those suffering from chronic illnesses, such as advanced and complicated heart and lung diseases, should not return.

UNMIK recommended that repatriation programmes should be coordinated and phased to limit the difficulties that would have inevitably arisen when attempting to absorb returnees and avoid the return of members of vulnerable groups for whom assistance was unavailable. In any case, governments were urged to continue to give priority to voluntary returns. Furthermore, the problem of security was still high on the agenda, as

frequent outbreaks of ethnic violence in Kosovo, and in the region as a whole, continued to cause great concern for the overall stability of Kosovo. It was suggested that an escalation of the hostilities would require a reconsideration of both the province's capacity to absorb returnees and the appropriateness of sending people back into a security situation that could potentially explode at anytime.

In late 2001, as a response to the growing focus on minority returns in Kosovo, UNMIK established the Office of Returns and Communities with a mandate to coordinate minority returns. Moreover, in May 2002, the Office of the SRSG released a concept paper entitled 'The Right to Sustainable Return' which outlines basic humanitarian principles in relation to return, including the goal of creating a multi-ethnic Kosovo. The paper establishes basic principles which guide UNMIK's approach to both spontaneous or assisted returns of internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugees. The guiding principles proposed are based upon international human rights and humanitarian standards, and were developed in consultation with UNHCR. The paper states that:

"The role of UNMIK or any governmental authority is neither to mandate return locations nor to dictate to IDPs and refugees how and when they may return, but to facilitate the improvement of conditions so that IDPs and refugees have the opportunity to exercise the individual decision to return." (UNMIK, 2002b, p.4)

The paper emphasises the need for ensuring the voluntary character of return movements and stresses the importance of guarantying the right to return in safety and dignity of all refugees. The principles outlined in the paper were meant to ensure that those individuals that decide to return are able to safely and sustainably do so. The main key points guiding UNMIK's approach to return are the following: the need of sustainable social and economic conditions for returnees; the use of a right-based approach to ensure that return is voluntary and sustainable; the importance of return to the specific place of origin; a bottom-up approach, involving the returnees in the decisions that affect their future; the engagement of the entire community in the return process and the promotion of inter-ethnic dialogue.

This paper was followed by three main UNMIK activities: the launch of the Task Force on Returns¹⁶ (TFR), the publication of a Manual for Sustainable Return¹⁷ and the Rapid Response Returns Facility (RRRF).¹⁸

In the document ‘2003 Strategy for Sustainable Return’, UNMIK outlines the future strategy on return and indicates three main challenges for the future:

- “Security - creation of a safe and secure environment for all Kosovans regardless of ethnicity.
- Sustainability - enabling minorities and returnees to live in peace and participate fully in society.
- Space - generating adequate housing for returnees.”

(UNMIK, 2002a, p.7)

In conclusion, UNMIK’s position on the return of refugees to Kosovo focused on three main aspects of the return process: refugees’ right to return, their right to go back to a sustainable life in the country of origin and the need to organise and stage their repatriation. The government of the countries of exile were advised not to force refugees to return, to cooperate with the relevant institutions in Kosovo to make sure that repatriation movements were organised, coordinated and in stages. Moreover, UNMIK mirrored the UNHCR worries about the volatile security situation in Kosovo and about the return of particularly vulnerable groups.

9.2.6 ECRE’s position on return

The UNHCR and UNMIK’s position on return were amplified in Europe by ECRE. In 2000, in view of the approaching end of temporary protection for many Kosovar refugees in various European countries, the organisation produced a position paper on returns to

¹⁶The TFR was launched in November 2002, it is chaired by the SRSG at the central level and has the authority to approve recommended return projects and allocate resources accordingly.

¹⁷Published in January 2003, it is a practical guide for the implementation of the principles established in the position paper on the right to sustainable return.

¹⁸The RRRF has been created in 2003 to provide housing assistance and socio-economic support to individuals and small groups returning to areas of Kosovo where they are a minority.

Kosovo based on reports of international organisations and NGOs. The paper expressed concerns for the number of forced repatriation that had already occurred in most EU member states and the possible increase in the following months.

“ECRE urges states to fully observe UNMIK’s recommendations as to the number and profile of individuals to be returned and as to the voluntariness of their return, all of which are necessary conditions for the sustainability of the repatriation process. Host states will be judged not only on their earlier generosity towards refugees, but also on their capacity to promote refugee repatriation in a dignified and humane manner.” (ECRE, 2000, p.3)

ECRE underlined that the region was still unsafe, that returns should be staged in order to avoid the overburdening of Kosovo’s capacity to integrate returnees and bringing further instability to the region.

9.2.7 Summary

This overview of the main developments in Kosovo over the past five years indicates that despite some obvious progress, regarding both the physical and administrative infrastructures, the situation is still quite precarious. UNMIK is still far from handing over full power to Kosovars, the security situation is still very fragile, the economy is weak and despite the new deadline set to reach the eight standards established by UNMIK, the future status of Kosovo is still quite uncertain. These conclusions substantiate some of the worries refugees expressed about their possible return to Kosovo during the interviews, as I explain later in the chapter. Moreover, they are reflected in the general chorus of international organisations, institutions on the ground and NGOs stating that the situation of Kosovo over the past years has continued to remain unstable, with security issues representing a main concern for the wellbeing of returnees in general and vulnerable groups in particular. It was amply recognised that the return of refugees had a central role in the development of Kosovo from a socio-economic point of view and, especially, from a political one; therefore, unless returns were organised and staged, they might become an obstacle to progress. These recommendations have been often disregarded by countries of exile that have either openly forced Kosovars to go back or

have created situations that left little choice to the refugees but to return. The following section offers an analysis of the specifics of the UK and Italy's repatriation policies for Kosovar Albanians.

9.3 Repatriation policies and programmes in the UK and Italy

In the following sections I examine the position of the UK and Italian governments on the repatriation of Kosovar Albanians in order to understand the political frame within which refugees approached the possibility to return.

The analysis of the conditions for potential returnees in Kosovo and the recommendations of the main organisations involved with refugees' return discussed so far provide a valuable basis for the understanding of the position of countries of exile on Kosovar Albanians' return. Moreover, some of the findings of the previous two chapters on the conditions in exile of both refugees who arrived independently and those who were evacuated, can help in placing their approach to return into perspective and provides important elements for a better understanding of the context of their choice.

In each country section, I begin with an analysis of the specific repatriation policies for Kosovar Albanians and proceed with an examination of the return schemes and an account of the opinion of the refugees I interviewed on the programmes. Finally, I conclude with a comparison of the conditions for return in both countries.

9.3.1 Repatriation of Kosovar Albanians from the UK

On the 9th of May 2000 all Kosovars who had arrived in the UK under the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme received a letter from the Home Office saying that it was time for them to go home. The letter said:

“The UNHCR has stated, most recently in its situation report of March 2000, that it is safe for the vast majority of Kosovan Albanians to return to Kosovo.

This is amply demonstrated by the one million who have voluntarily chosen to return from neighboring countries since July 1999. It was always the case that Kosovans granted temporary protection would be expected to go back once the war was over and won and was judged safe for them to do so. That time is now. The temporary protection regime will not be extended.” (Brett, 2000)

Despite the fact that the situation in Kosovo was not fully resolved yet, the Home Office supported this position referring to the early massive return from neighboring countries, which the UNHCR had already explained should not be construed as an indication of safe conditions in Kosovo, and the use of partial information derived from the UNHCR March 2000 report; the letter reestablished beyond doubts that refugees had always been expected to go back to Kosovo as soon as possible and that ‘that time was now’.

The expectation that at the end of the one year of ELR they would return home was also reinforced by the setting up of an Explore and Prepare scheme, later followed by a specific voluntary return programme, and a growing number of negative decisions on asylum claims and appeals by Kosovar Albanians, followed by removal¹⁹ or deportation.

9.3.1.1 Explore and Prepare

The programme Explore and Prepare run between December 1999 and April 2000, and was funded by the government and run by the IOM. It was open to all Kosovars who had ELR and were heads of households or community leaders, both women and men, but was available only to one person per family. Those undertaking the programme received already their return grant of 720 Deutschmarks, equivalent to approximately £250, distributed by IOM as soon as they arrived in Kosovo at Pristina/Prishtina airport. They received this sum just once and the rest of their family would eventually get their grant when they arrived in Kosovo as well.

This programme was not intended by the government to offer the opportunity to visit

¹⁹Deportation normally has the consequence that a person cannot return while the deportation order is in force, which normally is a minimum of three years, and it gives right to an in-country right of appeal; removal allows only an out-country right of appeal.

Kosovo to evaluate the situation and decide whether to return or not, but rather as a way for heads of households and community leaders to go and prepare for the eventual return of the rest of their family or community. An internal government document stated that: "Participants must be made aware that explore and prepare visits are to prepare for permanent return and not just about looking and seeing".

Also the letter addressed to the refugees stated that:

"Many Kosovans have benefited from the 'Explore and Prepare' programme which we ran between December last year and April this year. This provided an opportunity for you to make advance preparations for the permanent return of your families. You are now expected to make preparations to return home by the end of your period of leave." (Brett, 2000)

Despite the unmistakable goal of the government, the Explore and Prepare programme was welcomed by several NGOs, including the Refugee Council and Refugee Action, that interpreted the programme more as a chance for the refugees to take a better informed decision about return rather than a preparation for return itself. This view was supported by the fact that the scheme gave the opportunity to come back to the UK to the refugees and decide not to return to Kosovo. The Refugee Council expressed this judgment on the scheme which is in contrast with the position of the Home Office: "Explore-and-Prepare visits enable individuals to assess conditions in order to make an informed choice about when to return with other family members" (Refugee Council, 1999b).

However, in practical terms the main aim of the scheme remained return and this was clear even when looking at the difficulties involved if wanting to reenter the UK after visiting Kosovo:

1. Refugees had been given ELR for 12 months and they had to make their return journey on Explore and Prepare within this 12 months;
2. The UK government was not going to extend ELR in order for the refugees to take up Explore and Prepare;

3. If they left it too late to book on a return flight to the UK they would not have their ELR extended to enable them to reenter the UK on the Explore and Prepare programme.

The risk of not being able to return to the UK worried refugees and many preferred not to take a chance. Furthermore, the risk of losing housing and welfare benefits while being away from the UK made the scheme particularly unattractive, since many reception centres might have closed in the meantime and benefits or job seekers allowance could have been stopped during the absence.

“I wanted to go on this trip, but then I understood that I could lose all support if I went and decided to come back. There were so many things to do to make sure my family was ok here when I was out there, so many papers, so easy to make a mistake and I decided not to go. What if I made a mistake and they told me I could not come back here again? What if I find my life is still in danger? What if my family lost all support? No, I decide not to risk with my life and my family.” Ardian (M, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

Avoiding these problems required special attention and preparation before refugees left to avoid remaining without support upon return to the UK, but the various options and provisions to prevent all this were complicated to follow. In order to overcome this, the Refugee Council prepared a detailed Bulletin on Explore and Prepare with all the necessary information for both service providers and refugees explaining all their options and indicating where to seek further help. It was mostly thanks to the help, advice and support provided by the NGO sector that many refugees actually managed to use the programme as a means to decide about return.

The vast majority of the refugees I interviewed commented on the programme saying that it was useful for those people who had already planned to return to Kosovo or thought that they had no alternatives in the UK and feared deportation since their ELR period was close to expiring. For many this could have been a form of help to take an

informed decision on whether to stay or to go if the process to guarantee that they would still have a house and their benefits upon return was simpler to follow. Moreover, it seemed clear to many respondents that the scope of the programme was indeed to send them back for good. One of them commented that if it was organised to help them to decide about return the name of the programme would have been 'Explore and Decide', "if they called it Explore and Prepare", he said, "they have their reasons".

Overall, 192 families of the 423 that sent a representative on Explore and Prepare have returned permanently. According to the LGA 74% said that going on Explore and Prepare had been helpful in preparing to return to Kosovo. Coming back they reported about the conditions they found: around 35% of them found that their house had been totally destroyed, 53% said it was damaged or empty and only 12% of them found it intact; Moreover, only 14% reported that they had a job to go back to and 34% were still concerned about the lack of security in Kosovo (Refugee Council, 2000b).

As the end of ELR approached, for many of those in the scheme who decided to come back to the UK a new chapter of their life in this country had begun their fight to stay.

9.3.1.2 The end of ELR

When the end of the year of temporary protection approached, refugees with ELR had three options in the UK: to apply for an extension of ELR, to submit an asylum claim or to return. Once ELR expired, if people had not lodged an ELR extension or asylum application, they were considered as 'overstayers', which was a criminal offence that stopped all their benefits and could lead to deportation. Those who had arrived independently in the UK and had had their asylum claim suspended in 1999 to receive 12 months ELR in line with the evacuees, needed to resume their outstanding claim.

If the extension of ELR was refused refugees could return 'voluntarily' to Kosovo, appeal, decide to submit an asylum claim or would have become 'overstayers'. Similarly, if asylum was refused they could return 'voluntarily' to Kosovo, appeal or would have become 'overstayers'. Once people were issued with a final refusal of their application they were given a date for removal providing instructions of when and where to go to

be sent back. If they did not attend the date of removal they became ‘overstayers’ and liable to arrest, detention and deportation. If deported they could not legally reenter the UK for several years.

During the wait for a decision on their claims or appeals, refugees passed to different kinds of support system depending on various circumstances, with many passing to NASS. In any case, now that Kosovo was considered to be safe for Kosovar Albanian refugees the chances for their asylum claims to be accepted were very slim.

“I have little hope; they say that now Kosovo is safe. I tell you, it is not safe at all, but they don’t want us here, so it is safe. I am sure they will not accept my appeal, I am so unlucky! There is the election soon (2001) and they want to say to people that they are getting rid of asylum seekers.”

Petrit (M, 18, s, arr:1999, student)

The Home Office statistics on the number of asylum applicants from SAM ²⁰ that were refused asylum since the year 2000 confirm this fear, as Table 9.1 shows.

Year	Asylum Applications	Asylum Granted	Exceptional Leave	Refused Claims
1997	1865	1355	210	380
1998	7395	935	75	565
1999	11465	6290	85	460
2000	6070	275	815	13830
2001	3230	360	2060	9010
2002	2265	225	825	2450
2003	815	30	335	1625

TABLE 9.1: Asylum statistics from SAM - Source: Home Office (Heath 24 August 2004)

According to Heath et al. (2004), there are good grounds to believe that the vast majority of the claims from FRY asylum seekers that were refused were actually from Kosovars.

²⁰Serbia and Montenegro (SAM) replaced Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) from 5 February 2003. SAM comprises the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Montenegro, and the Province of Kosovo (administered by the UN on an interim basis since 1999).

9.3.1.3 ODA: Voluntary repatriation programme

The Home Office's letter received by the refugees on the 9th of May 2000 explained that in view of the end of the one year ELR, the government had already organised a voluntary permanent return programme for both refugees who arrived under the HEP and those who arrived independently. The letter explained that approximately a flight per week had been organised to take them back and that arrangements had been made for them to have their possessions taken to Kosovo overland. The letter also indicated that the Home Office was aware that some refugees were still reluctant to return and, therefore, a new form of 'incentive' had been considered by raising the amount of the return grant from £250 to £400.

The letter said:

"We know that some of you still have reservations about when to return. To help you readjust to life in Kosovo, we decided to increase the return grant to 1300 DM per person, with effect from the flight on 5th May. Kosovans who have previously benefited from E&P and received a grant of 720 DM will receive a 'top up' grant of 580 DM if they register by 10th June and return permanently before 25 June. We cannot guarantee any financial assistance after that date." (Brett, 2000)

The return grant was part of a larger specific return programme that the Home Office Enforcement Policy Unit decided to fund. This was the Kosovan Voluntary Assisted Return Programme (KVARP) which was set up in June 1999 following the end of the hostility and the entry of the KFOR in Kosovo. This project was funded under a separate line of budget with respect to general voluntary return projects open to all refugees. It began to operate in August 1999 and ended on the 25th of June 2000 and was open to all Kosovars (HEP and non-HEP). The specific KVARP was named ODA, which means 'Meeting Room' in Albanian, and was set up to work as an interagency project involving IOM and Refugee Action.

The role of IOM London was mostly that of providing specialised services for returnees

at the pre-departure and departure phase. Refugee Action, instead, offered advice, information and counseling to individuals who were considering return. ODA provided information and advice on the situation in Kosovo including housing, available aid, education, medical services and security; immigration and family reunion; specialist advice for children; 'Explore and Prepare'; books, newspapers and internet access.

According to official figures a total of 2,906 refugees returned to Kosovo through this programme, 2,396 evacuees and 510 of the refugees who had arrived independently. This represented around 50% of the evacuees and a very low percentage of the spontaneous arrivals. Nevertheless, this figure was generally perceived as a success by the government and NGOs considering that this rate and speed of return was unprecedented on a programme of this nature. According to the Refugee Council (2000b) on the last six flights, 83 families said that they were returning because their ELR expired, they were refused extensions or were finding it too difficult to stay in the UK due to benefits being removed, therefore, they did not really have a choice about returning to Kosovo. According to the Refugee Council's survey the main reasons given for choosing to return to Kosovo after the expiry of ELR were: being reunited with family members, returning to the homeland, and starting to rebuild properties (Refugee Council, 2000b).

Throughout the KVARP, the refugee sector maintained the position that returning should be voluntary and that there should be some planning for people for whom return was not an option. However, the voluntary nature of these returns was questionable considering that the options for those whose ELR expired and did not want to return were essentially limited to an individual claim for ELR extension or an asylum claim which had little chance to be accepted since Kosovo had been proclaimed to be safe for Kosovar Albanians. Moreover, the government's insistence that refugees should return aggravated the situation by putting further pressure on refugees while they were trying to take a decision.

In mid-April 2000, the Home Secretary Straw affirmed that it was now broadly safe for Kosovars of Albanian extraction to go back to Kosovo and that their one year of temporary protection, which would have started to run out between April 28 and early June, was not going to be renewed unless there were exceptional circumstances. He

declared: "Enforcement action will be taken in due course against those who do not go back voluntarily" (Travis, 2000b). In his term the 'choice' was either return 'voluntarily' or be deported.

It is indicative that the highest number of returns was from those who had arrived in the UK through the HEP and, therefore, had ELR, while of the over 10,000 spontaneous refugees only about 500 went back with the KVARP. According to Smart (2004) by August 2000, 2,396 evacuees had already returned and as of July 2003 only around 500 of them were still in the UK. Some of the refugees that returned after the ODA project ended have used the general voluntary return programme for refugees of all nationality. Others have returned independently, but there are no records or statistics available on these cases.

9.3.1.4 Deportation

When the programme ended, the refugees who wanted assistance with their return could contact the general VARP, while those who stayed and were refused asylum or an extension of ELR faced the nightmare of removal or deportation. The KVARP finished on the 25th of June 2000, while on the 24th Travis reported in *The Guardian* the concerns of the Labour MP Neil Gerrard, member of the all-party group of MPs on refugees, who had visited Kosovo and saw that some families who had been in the UK were living in unsustainable conditions. Therefore, he urged the government not to force Kosovar refugees back home. The article included also the government's answers to these concerns:

"The immigration minister, Barbara Roche, said that it had been made clear at the time the Kosovan evacuees had come that it was only for 12 months and they would be expected to return as soon as it was safe. A Home Office spokeswoman said she did not anticipate that enforcement action would start after tomorrow. Those who had not yet left would be given the opportunity to go voluntarily although they would not be eligible for a £400 repatriation grant." (Travis, 2000a)

These official statements emphasise once more the fact that the ‘choice’ was between ‘voluntary’ return or deportation. Among the refugees I interviewed, the vast majority of those who did not have refugee status or ILR were waiting for the final decision on their appeal or were fighting against deportation at the time of the interviews. These also included refugees whose specific conditions had been indicated by the UNHCR as particular valid reasons for continuous fear of persecution in Kosovo and whose claims had been rejected. For example, this was the case of Azim who is of mixed ethnic origin, or Petrit who comes from an area where Kosovar Albanians are a minority, or Stela who is considered a collaborator of the regime because she worked in a government office.

“This government is more generous than others in Europe, but still I have the feeling that the people who process the applications are not prepared to do this job. I feel as if getting asylum is a matter of luck and chance, as if they play with..., you know that flower (she referred to daisies) ‘he loves me, he loves me not?’ When I explain my fears, they tell me ‘How can people in Kosovo know who you are and what job you did?’ They do not understand the small reality of Kosovo and Prishtina. It is not like London! Then they say that if my husband has returned it means it is safe for me and my son to go as well. I know my people, I know how revenge works in Kosovo, they always try to hurt a blood related male of your family²¹, your father, brother, son. That is why my husband is not so much in danger, but my son is. They do not understand and they have refused my case two times.” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

During 2001 there was an escalation of removals²² to Kosovo, despite the fact that the UNHCR and UNMIK had warned that Kosovo was not a safe place yet and that it could not sustain large numbers of destitute returnees. According to the Refugee Council (2000a), between the 20th of March 2001 and 3rd of May 2001, the Home

²¹Malcom (1998) explains that according to the Kanun, the traditional Albanian codes of law, honour is cleansed by killing any male member of the family of the original offender.

²²Often, in order to remove people, the Immigration Service, sometimes accompanied by the police, visits the individual or family’s home without notice, arrests them and conducts them to holding facilities where they are transferred to the custody of Wackenhut, the private security firm contracted to run in-country escorting services for the Home Office (Home Affairs, 2003).

Office removed 254 people to Pristina/Prishtina on eight specially chartered flights and the process continued every month. There are no specific statistics available on the number of removals of Kosovar Albanians to Kosovo, however, the statistics of The Research Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office say that between May 2001 and April 2004 a total of 6,380 people were removed back to the FRY (based on statistics from RDS (2004)). It is plausible that a large majority of these were sent back to Kosovo. An Albanian interpreter who worked on charter flights to accompany people back to Albania and Kosovo, affirmed that during that time there were weekly flights full of people sent back to Kosovo. The flight would first land in Albania and leave some passengers there and then go to Kosovo to leave the others. In fact, since April 2000, both Kosovars and Albanians had been returned to the Balkans on charter flights on a weekly basis and this system was discussed as a good example of successful removals in front of the Home Affairs Committee that prepared a report on Asylum Removals in 2003 (Home Affairs, 2003). Evaluating the problems related to the use of commercial airlines and the costs of charter flights for few individuals, a member of Loss Prevention International, a company hired by the government to escort refused immigrants on commercial flights, said to the committee that the cost per head of removing an Albanian or a Kosovar using a charter flight is one-tenth of that using a scheduled one when a group of people are sent together on the same flight. The committee notes on its report that this witness also explained that removal with a charter flight is more 'humane' because, as he put it: "the whole thing is done without being in the public eye and therefore the whole temperature of the operation is reduced considerably" (Home Affairs, 2003). The 'reduced temperature' regarded the level of visibility of the operations and, therefore, media attention, however, sources revealed that the situation on the flights was often 'very heated' indeed. In some cases the flight would be quiet and people looked resigned to their destiny, but in many other cases there were protests and attempts to resist.

9.3.1.5 Refugees' opinion on ODA

The majority of the interviewees had heard about the KVARP and thought that the scheme was useful to help those refugees who had decided to go, or had no other choice but return, to plan their trip. They also welcomed the government return grant saying that this could allow people to have a decent start once in Kosovo but they thought that the amount was not a significant contribution especially for those whose houses had been totally or partially destroyed and had no job to go back to. Some of them were also concerned that the one-off grant from the UK government could impede the returnees to qualify for other forms of assistance in Kosovo.

“If they give you this money what can you do? They help, but you cannot support your family for a year or rebuild a house. Yes, it is a good start, but then? There are no jobs to go back to. How do you keep going? I also heard that if you take money from here to Kosova, the organisations there do not help you because you have something, even if this something is gone in a minute!” Juliana (F, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

As a matter of fact, in most areas returnees did not qualify for food aid because they had received return grants, even a delegation of ODA who visited Kosovo in April 2000 to assess the conditions on the ground, indicated this problem: “In most areas, returnees are considered not to qualify for food aid, however vulnerable they may otherwise be, because they have a return grant” (ODA, 2000, p.4).

According to the refugees, the majority of their co-nationals who wanted to return as soon as possible to Kosovo wished to rejoin other families and friends from whom they had been separated at the time of the flight or the evacuation. Others, wanted to go and take care of their property with the help of other relatives who remained in the UK; many were children who did not have much say in the family's decision while the elderly simply could not cope with life in the UK because of language barriers and less able to adapt to a new society.

Many interviewees were concerned about the many refugees who they thought were returning prematurely simply because they could not stay in the UK after their permission expired. They explained that the reason for not using the programme was a general lack of intention to return. They were worried about their safety, the lack of medical and educational structures, and the general political and economic situation in Kosovo. Those who were waiting for a decision on their appeal and feared a possible deportation were particularly concerned about those people who returned because of a lack of alternatives to stay and were critical of the pressure received through the advertisement of the KVARP for people to go on the programme.

“Can they guarantee safety for people’s lives, I do not think so! So why do they keep advertising this programme, they shouldn’t.” Alban (M, 20+, m, arr:1999, student)

In conclusion, the main reasons for not using the voluntary assisted repatriation programme, was a general fear for their lives, the general lack of wish to return and the conviction that the financial support offered by the scheme was not sufficient and was, actually, an impediment to receiving further help in Kosovo.

9.3.2 Repatriation of Kosovar Albanians from Italy

As explained in the previous chapter on the evacuation of Kosovar Albanians, the Italian government had been very clear about the fact that evacuees from Kosovo were receiving a temporary permission to stay that was expected to lead to return. The final ministerial decree defining the terms for the cessation of temporary protection of September 2000 considered two main options: assisted repatriation or removal. However, as a result of the pressure exercised by advocacy groups and NGOs, the same document gave the opportunity to temporarily protected Kosovars to stay with a different form of residence permit. Therefore, the options were either submitting an asylum claim, asking for a humanitarian residence permit or proving to have a job and becoming a ‘labour migrant’ (Amore, 2002a).

As I explain below, a particular event characterises the position of the Italian government vis-à-vis the end of the war in Kosovo, this is the apparent early request of the evacuees who were in the reception centre in Comiso to be sent back, before the government had even expressed an official position on repatriation to Kosovo. I question this interpretation of the early repatriation of evacuees from Comiso's reception centre later in the chapter, however, this gave the government authority to claim that 'return' was what refugees were longing for and that it was safe for them to return.

Before analysing the specific case of refugees in Comiso's reception centres and the assisted repatriation programme, I explain below the general options refugees had at the end of temporary protection.

9.3.2.1 The end of Temporary protection

As mentioned before, the options after temporary protection ended were either obtaining refugee status or a humanitarian residence permit or receiving a residence permit linked to employment; I explore below the implications of each option.

With respect to the first option of submitting an asylum claim, the end of NATO's intervention in Kosovo and the international presence in the area made an individual asylum claim very difficult since the area was then officially considered 'safe' by the government. Therefore, refugees had high risks to have their claim rejected.

The second option, the humanitarian residency permit, gives access to health assistance, education and employment for six months renewable up to one year. The permit can be further extended provided that the person can prove to have a job. In this case, this kind of permit represented *de facto* another form of temporary answer to the problem and prolonged the limbo in which ex-temporarily protected people had lived until then, continuing to worry about extension of the permits and about the possibility that they might not be renewed.

The third option linked to a job placement is the most interesting one. The lack of quantitative data should not prevent us from considering this as the most 'successful' one. For the majority of Kosovar Albanian refugees this sounded as a natural step

considering that before the cessation of temporary protection status they had already found a job. In this case they could stay in Italy but the state did not consider them to be refugees anymore. The switch from refugees to 'labour migrants' on paper made them subject to the Aliens Law and this had consequences for them. For example, the changes and tougher measures introduced by the new Bossi-Fini law brought back the fear of deportation. The law was approved in 2002 and one of the crucial points that affect particularly *de facto* refugees is that the law introduces the possibility to deny the renewal of the residence permit to a migrant who has lost his job after six months of unemployment, which implies the risk of expulsion. For all expulsions, the law makes it compulsory that they be immediately enforced, regardless of whether it is likely that the person receiving the expulsion order may abscond. At the time of the fieldwork, refugees were very worried about the changes introduced by this restrictive immigration law and worried especially about this point. However, many were confident that with the support of their strong network if a Kosovar Albanian lost his/her job, he/she would be able to find another one within six months.

With an explanation of the options given to all temporarily protected Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy in place, I now focus on the specific case of the evacuees who were hosted in the reception camp in Comiso and to their particular return.

9.3.2.2 Repatriation from the refugee camp in Comiso

Approximately a month after evacuees first arrived in the reception camp in Comiso, they finally received the necessary documents that allowed them to leave the camp and immediately began to do so. By the 20th of June the estimated number of people who had already left was 600 (Cabibbo, 1999a). One of the volunteers who worked in the camp explained that CARITAS had managed to organise three minibuses to take the volunteers back and forth from the camp and to take the refugees outside to special medical appointments or for other needs. However, they were soon asked by refugees to transport them to train and bus stations to leave or to meet relatives that had come to pick them up, with the main destinations being Germany, Switzerland and the North of Italy. While there are no official records of the spontaneous departures from Comiso,

since people were free to leave the camp at any time, UNHCR officials estimated that in all between 1800 and 2000 people from the camp in Comiso headed North. Clearly, the situation was not under control and there were cases of people who left the camp with suitcases and provisions only to return a few days later empty handed. The hypothesis was that they might have been victims of criminal organisations that had managed to reach the camp with false promises of taking them to Germany or Switzerland (Cabibbo, 1999a).

In Comiso, refugees seemed to have the same urge to return as many of those who returned immediately after the war ended from Kosovo's neighbouring countries. In early July, the Minister of Interior visited the camp where the refugee representatives stated that they wanted to go back as soon as possible, provided that the main cities were safe. Complaints were also raised about the support provided by the Italian government, because they had heard from relatives that refugees in other states were given more financial support with cash, while Italy did not give them any. During her visit, the Minister of Interior replied by saying that if the refugees wanted to go back on their own initiative they were free to go, but that the government wanted to make sure that the situation was safe and that mines were cleared before taking the responsibility of flying them back. She was confident, though, that it was only a matter of days before they would be ready to organise the first returns (Cabibbo, 1999c). Indeed, the first group of 580 people left on the 6th of July 1999 while the last refugees left Comiso at the end of August 1999, reaching the airport in Catania on military buses and being flown on military planes back to Scopje. Once they arrived, they crossed the border and NATO soldiers escorted them to their city or village of origin (Iozzia, 1999). Only about 200 people decided to stay in Italy and requested to be taken to the North where the majority of the Kosovar Albanians who had arrived spontaneously throughout the 1990s had settled (Cabibbo, 1999b; Schembri, 1999b).

These early mass repatriations from Comiso were immediately questioned by some of the NGOs and voluntary associations working in the camp. Their doubts were fuelled by the following considerations: the refugees left months before the end of the temporary protection status which lasted until December 1999 (and was later renewed until the 30th

of June 2000); they did not apply for other kinds of permit to stay in the country such as a study visa, a work permit or asylum; and, some of the problems in the camp, which I explained in the previous chapters, had made their life difficult. It was argued that the situation in Kosovo was far from safe and that the refugees were not sufficiently supported so as to be able to take an informed decision. In addition, they also criticised the lack of preparation in view of return and support for reintegration for what was a very vulnerable population constituted mostly of women and children. According to the Italian Consortium of Solidarity (ICS), hundreds of refugees in Comiso never asked to return or clearly stated that they did not want to return, but repatriation was presented to them and perceived by them as an unavoidable necessity (La Repubblica, 1999). It was pointed out that the leaflets distributed to the refugees in the camp in Comiso omitted all information about the various possibilities to prolong their stay in Italy and that all the problems they faced in the camp acted as a push to leave. Having a better understanding of the full reasons behind the early repatriation of the refugees from Comiso would require a study of the returnees' account. Nevertheless, the questions raised by NGOs regarding the premature departures from Comiso and their specific observations acquire further validity when examined within the context of the reaction of the remaining population of Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy, considering that the overwhelming majority did not choose to participate in the IOM voluntary repatriation programme that was set up at a later stage.

9.3.2.3 IOM voluntary assisted return programme

As explained earlier in the thesis, the Italian government had included provisions for an assisted return programme in the ministerial decree that extended temporary protection and established that IOM would run the programme. The first phase of IOM's work, from April to May 2000, entailed a survey of the Kosovar population in Italy with the aim of collecting useful information about their inclinations towards return and understanding their needs for an effective assisted repatriation. The IOM research team selected a representative sample of the Kosovar population which had arrived in Italy between June 1998 and December 1999. The sample included 555 heads of families and obtained

information for a total of 1,100 people. A part of the population was reached through reception centres, local authorities and police headquarters while IOM's personnel interviewed directly those refugees who were staying in 'non-assisted' accommodation (IOM, 2000a). According to IOM (IOM, 2000a), the response of the refugees to the survey was satisfactory; however, many people were reluctant to answer for fear of forced repatriation. The survey concluded that there was a clear lack of propensity towards return among the Kosovars who were still in Italy with temporary protection. Only 5.6% of the interviewees seemed willing to consider return. The reasons that justified the decision not to go back were varied; at the top of the list was the lack of security in the region, followed by a lack of housing and employment opportunities. It was not surprising that when the repatriation programme started only 120 families decided to take part in it.

After the survey, IOM submitted a project proposal to the government for the voluntary assisted repatriation of refugees with temporary protection from the Balkans. The programme included logistic assistance to return and economic incentives to support the socio-economic reintegration of the refugees in Kosovo. The government supported the programme, which was financed by both the Ministry of Interior and the Foreign Ministry, and started in September 2000 and finished in July 2001. It was carried out in collaboration with various actors in Italy and in Kosovo (UNHCR, local administrations, reception centres, NGOs, UNMIK, OSCE), and included a list of preliminary activities: a campaign to inform the refugees about the programme and its benefits; research in Kosovo to check the general state and the safety of certain specific areas; the registration of the refugees who wanted to use the programme; the organisation of the trip from Italy to Kosovo; the setting up of the initial financial contribution for the move and the first needs upon return. As soon as the refugees arrived in Kosovo, the programme of assistance to reintegration was taken over by IOM's offices in the region. About 120 families, for a total of 404 individuals, used the programme and after the first two months in Kosovo, IOM examined their conditions in order to organise the distribution of the financial assistance provided by the Italian government that was about 3,000,000 liras (1,500 Euros) per family. The criteria used to select the families took the following points into account:

- the composition of each family (in order to favour large families or families with the highest number of under 14 years old members);
- the destination of the contribution to reintegration (in order to favour projects sustainable in time and able to generate an income);
- the distribution in the territory (in order to favour the areas mostly destroyed by the war). (IOM, 2000b)

The money was given in two instalments, 60% after the project had been approved by IOM and 40% after IOM monitored what had been achieved with the first sum. According to IOM's final report 47% of the families used the money to buy basic furniture (beds, cookers, boilers, etc), 34% used them to fix or reconstruct their houses, 11% to start or improve a business and 8% for other purposes, such as medical assistance or education (IOM, 2000b). This shows that overall, 81% of the financial help did not contribute to the improvement or the development of projects that could generate income, but went to cover initial basic needs.

In order to understand the reasons why only 404 refugees out of the thousands Kosovar Albanians still remaining in Italy used the IOM programme to return, I asked my respondents to give me their opinions on the scheme.

9.3.2.4 Refugees' opinion on the IOM return programme

The general reason for not having taken part in the IOM return scheme was a general lack of intention to return to Kosovo (as the IOM survey had already emphasised). Few respondents were not aware of the existence of the IOM programme (six of them), the rest had either heard about it or had been interviewed for the initial IOM survey.

Generally, people did not trust the scheme and were afraid that it could be a way to hide forcible repatriation. According to some of the leaders of the Kosovar Albanian community, the programme was pushing for people to return and this was seen with suspicion. For example, even the Kosovar Albanian interpreters employed by IOM to carry out the survey and collect the data of those who took part in the programme

were mistrusted by many people in the community. Overall, the idea of registering with an organisation and leaving other people in charge of organising the whole trip was not appealing to many refugees and was seen as yet again a loss of power and control over their own lives. Those who expressed the wish to return one day, admitted that they would welcome some assistance eventually, but would want to be in charge of their decision and establish independently when and how to go. One of the interviewees said that he did not want anyone to tell him what to do with his life; going back to Kosovo was a dream of his, but he was the only person who had the right to establish when it was safe and appropriate for him to go.

“Non voglio che nessuno mi dica cosa devo fare della mia vita. Tornare in Kosova è un mio grande sogno, ma devo stabilirlo io quando la situazione è sicura e ci sono le condizioni necessarie per tornare.” Muhamet (M, 40+, m, arr:1994, factory worker)

The financial incentives for reintegration were considered quite insignificant. There were different perceptions of the actual amount given per family; however, everyone agreed that few million liras could not be enough to start a new life in Kosovo in the long term. Considering the level of destruction in the region and the poor economic situation, refugees believed that the financial support offered by the reintegration scheme was not enough to guarantee a sustainable existence in Kosovo. They considered the general costs of repairing/reconstructing a house and setting up an activity that could support a family and concluded that it required much more than what the Italian government offered.

A woman explained that she was not sure about the actual amount they were giving, maybe one or two million liras. She had the perception that people in Italy thought that this money would be a lot in Kosovo, but she said that it was nothing when you start thinking about building a house, furnishing it and setting up an activity to feed the family.

“Ti danno dei soldi, non so bene quanti. Uno o due milioni! Qui gli sembra che in Kosova questi soldi sono tanti, ma non sono tanti per niente se devi

rifarti la casa, comprare i mobili, metter su una attività per mantenere la famiglia.” Hana (F, 50+, m, arr:1998, factory worker)

As for the refugees who had returned, the interviewees thought that the refugees in Comiso were a particularly vulnerable group. They were aware of the fact that they were mostly women and children and thought that they returned because they did not have anyone who could help them in Italy. Similarly, the majority of those who returned with the IOM scheme had no one to help them settling in Italy. Nevertheless, in some cases, although they had families or friends in the country, they returned because it would have been easier to help them by sending remittances once they were back in Kosovo rather than support them in Italy. In certain cases the returnees also had the task of taking care of the properties of those who had remained in Italy. Some interviewees added that some of those who returned with the scheme were professionals, especially doctors, nurses and teachers, who felt a moral responsibility to go back as soon as possible to help with the reconstruction.

One of the leaders of the community in Italy, said that another problem with the programme was the fact that it was limited to a set time frame. Refugees had to register within a specific date (30th of September 2000) to be considered for assistance and this automatically excluded many people who were not ready to return at that time, but might feel safer and better prepared to go home some months later.

In conclusion, the main reasons for not adhering to the IOM voluntary assisted repatriation programme were the general lack of intention to return in the particular time established by the scheme or in the near future, a lack of trust in the ultimate goals of the government and the IOM, and the belief that the financial support was not significant enough to risk the consequences of a premature return.

9.3.3 Comparing Repatriation Policies and Programmes

The voluntary return programmes for Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy were mainly targeted at temporarily protected people, although in the UK they were open to all refugees. This seems to show that, despite the fact that the number of

Kosovar Albanians who arrived in both countries independently was higher than those of the evacuees²³, governments were under much more pressure to show that temporary protection was followed by return as they had originally promised to their electorate at the time of the crisis, than to actually send as many people as possible back or create the right conditions to achieve a larger and sustainable return movement. Moreover, given the official humanitarian rhetoric used to support the war and the crucial media attention received by the expelled refugees during the acute phase of the crisis, the possibility to show a high number of returns within a short timescale, contributed to define the success of NATO's intervention and justify it. Return operations in Kosovo have been defined as 'successful' by the whole international community and by specific governments, including the UK and Italy. The main indicators considered have been the high number of returnees and the relatively early time of repatriations rather than the quality of life of the returnees, the effects of mass return flows on Kosovo post-war reconstruction, the effects on the inter-ethnic dialogue, etc.. As discussed earlier in this chapter, most evidence shows that much work needs to be done in these areas and that conditions are far from indicating a full 'success' in a wider sense.

In both, the UK and Italy, the specific return programmes for Kosovar refugees provided some help to those refugees who wanted to return. However, given the conditions in exile there are strong doubts about the voluntary nature of their decision. Despite the UNHCR and UNMIK recommendations against forced and induced repatriation, both countries promoted and encouraged Kosovar Albanians to return after the war ended. Italy seems to have given refugees more options to stay than the UK since it gave refugees the opportunity to obtain a residence permit in relation to their employment situation. The UK forced some refugees to go back on the basis that Kosovo was now a safe place for them and, therefore, they did not qualify for refuge status or an extension of their leave to remain. This concerned those refugees who had temporary protection or were still waiting for an answer on their asylum claims, while refugees who had obtained a stable status were not put under the same pressure. As a matter of fact, the refugees who had been evacuated to the UK or Italy and those who arrived

²³As explain earlier in the thesis, there are no specific statistics on independent arrivals of Kosovar Albanians in Italy and the UK, but reliable estimates support this assumption.

spontaneously during the refugee crisis and received temporary protection, had been accepted with the understanding that they would go back as soon as it was safe for them to return. The main problem was the fact that in many cases the definitions of a ‘safe’ country coming from host countries’ governments, international organisations and refugees did not coincide.

As a result of these policies, the majority of those who went back with the return programmes were those who had left Kosovo during the acute crisis, had been through the worse violent phases of the conflict and were in the most vulnerable position in the country of exile. Not only were these refugees not in the best position to take a decision about the appropriateness for them to return in that given moment and experienced the consequences of an early repatriation that often meant living in fear and destitution, but their early return had consequences for the reconstruction of Kosovo as well, as UNMIK statements explained.

Table 9.2 provides a summary of the different options refugees had at the end of the Kosovo war in the UK and Italy. It distinguishes between temporarily protected refugees and refugees with a stable position in the country of exile since their status determined the options available to them. The table also summarizes the possible options for return.

In the UK the ‘choice’ was reduced in many cases to ‘voluntary return’ or ‘removal’ given the low success rate of asylum claims and requests for ELR extension. This meant that refugees did not have a choice about whether to return or not, but only about how to repatriate: on a voluntary return programme, independently, or deported by the UK authorities. In Italy the main options were ‘return’, ‘removal’ or ‘becoming officially a labour migrant’.

Refugees thought that the programmes were stressing the fact that the government wanted them to return and felt pressurised to do so. They worried about those who had returned because they believed that Kosovo was not safe yet and that those who went on the programmes were mostly very vulnerable groups of people who did not have enough resources to manage to stay. However, they thought that the schemes provided good support for those refugees who really wanted to go, but in any case thought that the financial support was not sufficient to restart a good life back home and could actually

exclude the possibility for returnees to be helped by organisations in Kosovo. For those who had a stable position in the UK or Italy, repatriation was a personal matter, they had the possibility to be in charge of their decision and organisation of their possible return and thought that this was how it should have been for everyone.

Status	Options at the end of the war	Modes of Return
United Kingdom		
TP	1.Apply for extension of ELR 2.Submit an Asylum Claim 3.Return	ODA, Kosovan Voluntary Assisted Return Programme which run between August 1999 and June 2000. Refugees taking this option received a grant of £250-£400 (in total 2,396 refugees returned with ODA, around 50% of the evacuee population in the UK). Voluntary Return Programme (VRP) Removal or Deportation, if their claims and appeals for ELR extension of asylum were refused. Independent Return
Refugee Status, ILR, Citizenship	Remain in the UK or return to Kosovo	ODA (only 510 refugees who had arrived independently returned with the programme). VRP Independent Return
Italy		
TP	1.Submit an asylum claim 2.Apply for a humanitarian residence permit 3.Apply for residence permit for employment reasons	IOM return programme which run between September 2000 and July 2001. Refugees taking this option received a grant of 1500 euros per family (in total 120 families for a total of 404 individuals used the programme, this was about 16% of the temporarily protected Kosovars in Italy). Independent return
Evacuees from Comiso	As above, but these options were not clearly explained to refugees	Military flights to Kosovo in July-August 1999 (more than 3000 people carried).
Refugee Status, Work Permit	Stay in Italy or return to Kosovo. Those who remained in Italy with a work permit became subject to general Aliens law	Return independently

TABLE 9.2: Refugees' options at the end of the war

9.4 Refugees and Return

At the time of the fieldwork none of the respondents thought that returning to Kosovo was a viable option in the near future, some of them indicated that they might return one day while others excluded this possibility completely. This was the case of refugees who had experienced terrible violence and felt that life in Kosovo would have been a continuous reminder of their suffering, some people of mix ethnic origin or in mix marriages who felt they would never be fully accepted in Kosovo's ethnically separated society and young people who had grown up in exile and could not imagine living in Kosovo. Moreover, while those who had managed to settle with a stable position in the UK and in Italy, (either because they had received ILR, refugee status, citizenship or a permission to stay linked to their job) were more open to discuss the possibility of returning in the future. In the UK those who were still waiting for a final decision on their claim or appeals tended to exclude categorically the possibility that they might return in the near future of their own initiative. This was due to the fact that in fear of deportation, they seemed to want to stress the risks for their life if forced to return back to Kosovo .

Overall, respondents listed various reasons for not wanting to return to Kosovo in the near future, some of the main general reasons were shared by all of them while others were more specific to particular circumstances. Although the qualitative nature of this research does not lend statistical validity to the findings, the data collected does provide an indication of the main reasons for which refugees were not considering return.

9.4.1 Security issues

The first reasons for concern were related to security issues as refugees worried first and foremost about possible future outbreaks of violence and had doubts about the future stability of Kosovo. They were well informed about the continuous clashes in various part of the province, the difficulties encountered by the international forces to keep the situation under control and the rising level of criminality. Not only did they follow the news in the country of exile and received direct information from relatives and friends

who were in Kosovo, but they also followed the more detailed news reports on the Kosovar television and, in many cases, used the internet to look for further information. There was a general consensus that Kosovo was not a safe place yet.

“Kosovo is not safe at the moment. There are still clashes at the borders and then there is no police, no legal system. How can a place where they need to keep so many soldiers be considered safe? Have you looked at the British Foreign Ministry’s website? They advise their people not to go because Kosovo is so dangerous, but then to us they say that everything is fine and we must go.” Rezar (M, 40+, s, arr:1997, mechanic)

Rezar was right, as the British Foreign Ministry’s advised British citizens “against *all* travel” to Kosovo. I last visited the website in September 2004 and Kosovo was still listed among the dangerous countries to avoid. The British Foreign & Commonwealth Office’s website as of September 2004 stated:

“Because of continuing tensions, we advise against all but essential travel to Kosovo. Serious incidents of ethnically motivated and extremist violence continue. Most recently, on 17 March 2004, there were violent clashes in Mitrovica (Northern Kosovo) which sparked sporadic incidents of violence throughout Kosovo, resulting in 19 fatalities (11 Albanian, 8 Serb) and over 900 other casualties. The Kosovo Assembly elections on 23 October 2004 may heighten ethnic tensions. [...]

Despite the presence of Kosovo Force (KFOR), there are still significant dangers in Kosovo, including residual mines and other unexploded ordnance in some areas. In the event of civil disorder, you are strongly advised to stay at home and restrict your movements as much as possible, especially after dark.” (British Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2004)

This supports Rezar’s worries and observations, and indicates that they would be still valid today (2004). The refugees’ fear of possible outbreaks of violence and clashes was confirmed to be well founded by the various violent episodes that have continued to take

place in Kosovo up until spring 2004. Moreover, respondents thought that even if at present the situation might have been considered relatively safe, in the future the unresolved question of Kosovo's status and the eventual departure of the international forces might lead to the explosion of a new conflict. They did not want to risk experiencing once more the violence that had already pushed them outside of Kosovo the first time. Drita thought that Kosovo was not very safe at the time of the interview but that until international forces were deployed there the situation was more or less under control. She worried about possible security problems the moment KFOR would leave. She said that the fact that some Serbs were still in Kosovo was not reassuring for her, since, as she put it, "their head is the same, these people do not change".

"Adesso la situazione in Kosovo non è molto sicura, ma almeno fino a quando ci sono quelli della NATO è un po' sotto controllo. Ma dobbiamo pensare che un giorno andranno via ed è questo che mi preoccupa. Ci sono ancora dei Serbi in Kosovo, io li conosco quelli! La loro testa è la stessa di prima della guerra, questa gente non cambia. Dio sa che può succedere!" Drita (F, 30+, m, arr:1994, factory worker)

Those Kosovar Albanians who came from areas where they were still a minority, those of mixed ethnicity or in a mixed marriage, and those who were suspected of being collaborators of the Serbs had specific fear for their safety in Kosovo and, as explained earlier, their worries were recognised by the UNHCR and UNMIK that considered them to be particular targets of persecution.

For everyone I interviewed, staying in the country of exile meant living in a safe environment with no fear for the present or the future.

"Here we are safe. Nobody is coming after us because of who we are. If we keep out of trouble we are left in peace. There are so many people from different nationalities here and being Albanian does not mean troubles anymore." Zenel (M, 40+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

Some people were concerned about racism in exile, but overall the likelihood of racist attacks in the UK or Italy was very small compared to the risks they would run in Kosovo. Jetmir was worried about the anti-immigration agenda of the Italian Northern League and pointed out that being a Southerner, I should be in a position to understand what he was talking about. He said that in order to avoid troubles they tried to keep a low profile not to attract attention, but that this did not compare to the fear and continuous tensions they would face in Kosovo because of the Serbs, other Albanians from different political parties or, simply, criminals.

“Qui abbiamo paura della Lega Nord. Sono razzisti, ce l’hanno contro gli immigrati, stranieri e anche quelli del Sud Italia, lo sai bene anche tu! Allora cerchiamo di non dare nell’occhio e non attirare attenzione. Ma in Kossovo è diverso, là dobbiamo preoccuparci ogni momento dei Serbi e altri Albanesi di partiti politici diversi e anche dei criminali.” Jetmir (M, 40+, m, arr:1995, unemployed)

Obviously, in the UK, the refugees who were worried about deportation did not feel safe.

“In Kosovo we were living in fear everyday. We came here to be safe, we are not criminals. And here we are living in fear again, waiting for them to send us back.” Juliana (F, 30+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

9.4.2 Economic conditions and infrastructures

Other important factors that discouraged people from going back were the badly damaged infrastructures and the poor economic conditions of Kosovo.

Many respondents had lost their houses in Kosovo and felt they could not start considering return until their house was rebuilt or, at least, until they had saved enough money to do so. Having lost the house in Kosovo was clearly holding back many people who felt that they could not go back unless they had rebuilt their property and had a place they could call home. Arjan said that his family was working very hard in Italy

to be able to save enough money to use to rebuild their house so that, as soon as it was safe for them, they could return. He explained that they would not qualify for external grants since they were working in Italy and, therefore, it was all up to them.

“Sto lavorando qui, la mia famiglia, o meglio quello che è rimasto della mia famiglia, sta lavorando tanto per mettere dei soldi da parte per ricostruire la nostra casa e tornare non appena la situazione è più sicura per noi. Vedi, siccome, siamo qui e lavoriamo, non ci possono dare contributi per la casa in Kosovo, ci dobbiamo pensare noi.” Arjan (M, 20+, s, arr:1998, factory worker)

Since houses were purposely destroyed during violent attacks, often under their own eyes, while some of their relatives were killed, raped, beaten or expelled, for many Kosovar Albanians rebuilding the house was not only a matter of necessity, but also a part of the grieving process and a sign of personal resilience. Ermal and his ninety years old grandmother showed me the pictures of their house before and after the war. The old lady held back her tears and smiled when pointing at the picture of their beautiful house and the flower filled garden of the two first pictures. Ermal explained that those were the only pictures of the house before the war that they had managed to save. The garden was the family's favourite place and every Sunday they used to take care of it together under the directions of his grandfather. He was shot in that same garden during the war. When we looked at the pictures of the house and the garden totally destroyed, they were both very distressed and Ermal said that though they kept looking at those pictures all the time, they could just not get used to them. They felt it was their duty to go back as soon as possible, rebuild the house and replant the garden in memory of his grandfather, but his grandmother was worried that she would not live long enough to see it.

Public services were also a reason for concern for respondents, with the main problems being the poor conditions of the health services and schools.

“My youngest son is going to school here, the teachers are fantastic and the school is very good. He is doing very well and at the end of his first year

he was already at the level of the other students. He had a hard time when he was a child during the war in Kosovo, and if we have to go back now I worry about his mental health and his education. The situation is not safe at all and the schools are really too basic there.” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

The poor economy added further doubts to the possibility of return. Refugees were worried because many of them knew that they would have no jobs to go back to if they returned. Edlira was trying to advise other Kosovar Albanians not to return because she thought that it was not the time to return yet since there was not a state they could trust in Kosovo; to make it possible to return they would need a stable accountable State, a different environment and a job.

“Io lo dico a tutti: ma dove andate? Non è tempo di tornare. Non c’è uno stato di cui potersi fidare. Per tornare ci vuole prima uno stato stabile ed affidabile, un clima diverso e un lavoro.” Edlira (F, 18, s, arr:1992, student)

The idea of going back and not being able to make a living and provide for their own needs represented a great obstacle to return for both those who were satisfied with their life in exile and those who were not. For example, Alban was satisfied with his job and his life in the UK and wanted to stay:

“There is no job in Kosovo to go back to, 60% of the people are unemployed. Here I have a good job, it gives me enough to live and support my family. I am even saving to rebuild the house in Kosovo. I have my dignity, there what do I do? How do I buy food for my kids?” Alban (M, 20+, m, arr:1999, student)

On the contrary, Saimir was not happy with the life of his family in Italy, but nevertheless he thought it was better than in Kosovo where they had no house left and no job to go back to. In any case, even if they found a job, salaries were too low while prices were as high as in Italy.

“Questa non è vita, non viviamo bene qua! Mi piacerebbe tornare perchè così non è bello vivere! Ma la situazine in Kosovo non è buona ancora. Non abbiamo casa, il lavoro non si trova e se si trova la paga è troppo bassa e la vita è cara come qua.” Saimir (M, 30+, m, arr:1991, shepherd)

Overall, people were disappointed with the little progress the economy in Kosovo had made and blamed the international community and UNMIK for it. One of the leaders of the community explained that the vast majority of those who returned permanently, or for a visit, expected that with the help of the international community Kosovo could become, as he put it, ‘the Switzerland of the Balkans’. They felt that more money should have been invested in the reconstruction of the infrastructure and in support of business that could create job opportunities. People believed that the bureaucracy of the international organisations was ‘swallowing’ all the money:

“They (employees of international organisations) have extraordinary salaries, expensive cars and satellite phones! Our people are starving and living thanks to our help as usual. If we join them and return, who is going to send us money?” Mitat (M, 40+, s, arr:1998, unemployed)

Those refugees who had completed further education, whether in Kosovo or in exile, thought they would have good chances to find employment if they returned, while those who had not studied and had limited skills felt they would not find a job.

Denisa claimed that working in Kosovo for her and her husband would not be that difficult because they were educated people and both international organisations and newly born local institutions would need them, however, according to her for uneducated people finding employment in Kosovo was really hard. In fact, Idlir felt that because of his lack of education he would definitely be unemployed in Kosovo.

“Ho solo la licenza elementare, se torno resto di sicuro disoccupato.” Idlir
(M, 20+, s, arr:1994, factory worker)

Some refugees had also tried to find investors in the country of exile willing to start doing business in Kosovo; Jetmir said that with 1,000,000 liras they could start up a factory there, but though people showed interest in the possibility, the security problems, the instability of Kosovo and the lack of developed infrastructure stopped them from going ahead.

At this point, the three main reasons indicated by interviewees for not returning to Kosovo are very practical ones, lack of security, lack of adequate infrastructure and lack of employment opportunities. These leads us towards two observations: first, that these are relatively measurable factors that allow refugees to evaluate the costs and benefits of staying in exile or returning and decide what option is most convenient on this basis. However, the data also show that this is not always the case as other factors play an important role in the decision-making process either way, so that some people might return even if Kosovo for them is less safe than the country of exile, while others exclude returning *a priori* regardless of these factors; second, these factors could change and conditions could improve, therefore we might assume that if the security problem was solved, infrastructure were satisfactorily restored and employment opportunities increased notably, more refugees should tend to prefer return over settlement, but again the data indicate that this is not always the case. Below I examine these two points in more detail, relating them to the result of the interviews with respect to questions on the sense of 'duty' to return, the feeling towards a place to call 'home' and the long-term plan for the future of the refugees.

9.4.3 Return: a sense of duty

Given the cause of the Kosovar Albanian population asking for the right to be in and govern in Kosovo, the general commitment of the Diaspora to support the cause, the experience of expulsion and ethnic cleansing, there was a widespread assumption by the international community that return to Kosovo was what all the refugees wanted. I asked my respondents whether they thought they had a 'duty' to return and their answers varied according to their experiences and circumstance.

The leaders of the community and those refugees who were actively engaged in politics

felt that it was their duty to return, though they thought that the right moment for them had not come yet, both for personal reasons and for what they could still contribute to the cause from abroad. Behar affirmed with an authoritative tone that all Kosovar Albanians feel a duty to return and added that they learnt their nationalism from the Serbs.

“Tutti noi Kosovari sentiamo un dovere forte di tornare. Abbiamo imparato dai Serbia a essere nazionalisti.” Behar (M, 30+, m, arr:1991, construction site manager)

However, this was not what all the respondents thought. There was another category of people who felt a stronger duty to return than others. These were some of those refugees who felt their specific professional skills could have been of great help to the reconstruction of Kosovo and the wellbeing of its populations. In many cases, these were among the first categories of people who proactively decided to return, at times disregarding their own personal risks and their family situation. For example, Stela’s husband who is a doctor returned as soon as possible despite the fact that all his family remained in the UK and that his wife and his younger child could not return because she was considered a collaborator of the Serbian regime.

“When my husband heard on the Kosovar television that the country was praying for doctors to go back he went to ODA and asked to be sent back and left in September 1999. After thirty years of marriage we were separated! I understand him, his job is not normal, is more like a mission. He said when it is safe we can join him. That moment has not come, it is not safe.” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

Some of those who were in this position but had not returned yet felt guilty about it. This is the case of Arjan who is a nurse. He considered it a duty for those in his profession to contribute to the cause and felt guilty about not having joined the KLA first, and postponing his return now. In both cases, he said he knew he could have been very helpful, but he did not want to risk his life.

“Mi sento in colpa, non solo non sono andato con l’UCK, ma adesso sono ancora qua. Come infermiere sarei stato veramente utile all’UCK e adesso gli ospedali che hanno ricominciato a funzionare hanno bisogno. Ma io non me la sento di rischiare la vita così.” Arjan (M, 20+, s, arr:1998, factory worker)

Others, in this position had gone through different emotional stages to understand what to do, but had come to terms with the fact that the ultimate moral duty imposed by their profession was that of helping other human beings regardless of their nationality.

“Thanks to counseling I realised that what matters for me is to do something constructive for society but it doesn’t matter where I do it.” Omer (M, 30+, m, arr:1990, engineer)

The respondents who said that they did not consider return as a duty were people who did not feel a strong attachment to the national group and saw themselves as citizens of the world, or some of those who had been victims of violence before the flight.

In the first case, these were generally younger people who had been concerned about human rights abuses against Kosovar Albanians during the war and cared about the future of Kosovo, but did not give predominant importance to their national identity.

In the second case, the respondents had been victims of violence or had witnessed the killing of their families and friends, and thought that they had already paid the highest price for the national cause. They felt they had the right to attempt to rebuild their lives elsewhere. For example, this was the case of Tonin who had reached his brother in Italy after he had managed to escape the massacre of his entire village. Over 150 people were killed under his eyes and just talking about it was causing him terrible distress. Since the war ended he had gone back to Kosovo once, to bury some of his relatives whose bodies had been found. Going back for him was hard, seeing the place of the massacre again brought all memories back and he decided that he could never return there for good and go through the same pain every day. He felt his family had already paid a very high price during the war and now he had the right to try to have a new

life. He was still mourning and had nightmares every night, but at least in the morning he woke up to his new life.

“Quando sono tornato ho rivisto tutta la scena, tutti i morti. Non potrei mai tornare e rivivere ogni giorno questo dolore. La mia famiglia ha pagato un prezzo troppo alto per questa guerra, ora io ho il diritto di cercare di ricominciare. Ho ancora incubi ogni notte, ma almeno la mattina quando apro gli occhi ho davanti la mia nuova vita.” Tonin (M, 20+, s, arr:1999, builder)

Overall, the sense of duty to return depended on the refugees' commitment to the political cause of the Albanian population of Kosovo, their profession and their personal experience.

9.4.4 Feeling at home

Respondents gave three different answers when I asked them to explain where they felt their home was: for some it was Kosovo, for others the UK or Italy were their new home, for the rest it was both Kosovo and the UK or Italy.

Different people said that Kosovo was their home and gave different reasons for it. We can roughly distinguish three main groups: politically active refugees, elderly people and people not fully integrated in the country of exile.

The respondents who were politically active and involved with the cause said that Kosovo was home, independently of their personal background, their status and conditions in exile.

“I am really fine here, but home is in Kosovo. That is what I have been fighting for and living for, to protect my home.” Jalal (M, 40+, m, arr:1996, shop assistant)

For the elderly people who struggled to adapt to life in the country of exile Kosovo was undoubtedly their home. They hoped to go back as soon as possible and they wished to

die and be buried there. Ermal's grandmother spent all day talking about 'home' and she hoped to be able to live long enough to go back and die in Kosovo. An old man in the UK told me:

"Home? At the moment it is here, but to die it is there!" Agim (M, 80+, m, arr:1999, retired)

Kosovo was home also for those people who were not fully integrated in the society of the country of exile, who could not speak the language very well, did not have a job or a well-developed social network, and for those whose standards of life in exile were lower than the ones they had in Kosovo before the war. These refugees felt that they did not belong in the UK or Italy and considered Kosovo as their only home.

Home was either the country of exile or both Kosovo and the UK/Italy for the majority of the refugees who left Kosovo in their childhood or early youth and grew up in exile, the respondents who had decided that they did not want to return to live to Kosovo at any time in the future and those Kosovar Albanians who were integrated in the UK or Italy.

"In this country (UK) I have had the worst and the best time of my life, I was so young when I arrived! I belong here, this is my home. Here is where I became a man." Drin (M, 30+, m, arr:1992, social worker)

Edlira was only six when her family escaped to Italy, she knows Kosovo through the memories of her parents, the news and the few visits she has managed to make. She wished she could have spent her childhood there like her mother. She feels strongly about her Kosovar Albanian identity, but she feels that she does not belong there. She claimed that Kosovar society is not very liberal with young people, especially girls, and she prefers to stay in Italy where she feels free to do whatever she wants. She did not exclude return completely though, her words were "Never say never!".

For others, understanding where 'home' is was a difficult journey. This was the case of those people who had been in exile for a long time focusing their lives on the homeland

project in Kosovo and their eventual return, but realised, that they did not belong there anymore when they finally got the chance to go and visit. The experience of exile had changed them without them realising, the memory of Kosovo did not correspond to the new reality they saw and their conationals did not respond to their return in the way they expected them to. One interviewee more than others, among similar cases, opened herself to the point of explaining the mental shock and disoriented feeling that came from realising that 'home' is no longer 'home'. Denisa had left Kosovo in the early 1990s and had managed to go back for a visit two weeks after NATO's bombing campaign ended and stayed for three months. During her six years in the UK she had thought about doing and learning things that she could then use in Kosovo when she returned. Her urge to go was so strong that she went so soon even though she knew it was still very dangerous. However, after the first couple of weeks she begun to realise that it was not what she expected.

"Everyone was telling me the story of what they had been through; I heard those stories one hundred times all over again! At one point I started to resent them because they never asked about me and what I had been through in exile, the hard times, the fear, the anxiety! I felt we were rejected because we were seen as those who had left and did not see the atrocity happening. Our suffering abroad did not count. I also felt my good intention to return and try to set up a business there was not welcome. They told me that I had to stay in London because I had a good job there. 'You escaped the worst time and now you come back and with your good English you are going to take jobs away from us?' It was a shock; the people I had worried about for so long rejected me." Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

Denisa came back from her visit disoriented and felt the need to go for a visit another time in the hope that, with the situation improving, things would change for her. Not only this did not happen, but she also realised that she would not be happy there because exile had changed her.

"In London I am an independent young woman. I am single, I work and

support myself, have a social life and freedom. During my visits (to Kosovo) I understood that it is still hard for a 29 year old single woman with my degree of independency to live in that society and be respected. When I came back from my last trip I was even more in shock. I had lived all those years in London considering Kosovo to be my home and thinking of going back, now I knew it was not possible I couldn't go on living torn between two places. I fell into depression and finally went to counseling. It is only thanks to counseling that I have accepted that this is my home now." Denisa (F, 30+, s, arr:1990, beautician)

For some of the people who considered themselves to be well integrated in the society of the country of exile but felt also a strong attachment to Kosovo, 'home' was both Kosovo and the UK or Italy. This was more often the case in Italy though, where given the circumstances, such as the kind of residence permit refugees had and the geographical vicinity to Kosovo, people had managed to keep a closer relation with the country of origin over the years as explained in the chapter on settlement. Drita explained that their family's life was divided between Italy and Kosovo and, therefore, she felt at home in both places. She said that if one day she will return to Kosovo, part of her will remain in Italy.

"La nostra vita è divisa in due, un pochino in Kosovo, un pochino qui. Mi sento a casa sia qua che là, ma se un giorno tornerò per sempre in Kosovo, una parte del mio spirito rimarrà qua di sicuro." Drita (F, 30+, m, arr:1994, factory worker)

Another refugee gave me an example of the way he felt referring to the television advertisement of a vanilla and chocolate ice-cream whose slogan, in a funny anglicised Italian, was "Two gustis is meglio che one!", two tastes are better than one. He felt that having two places to call home was an advantage in his life as he could try to get the best out of both countries.

9.4.5 Plans for the future

Respondents had different views about their future, some refugees had made plans and established goals to achieve, others felt they could not have long-term projects and lived day by day. Making plans for the future was difficult for those refugees who were still waiting for a decision on their asylum claims and feared deportation. They felt their future was in the hands of the government of the country of exile. They wished to be able to stay in the UK or Italy and manage to rebuild their lives. Some of them tried to think about what to do in case they would be allowed to stay or forced to leave.

“If we will be able to stay here, my husband (who was in Kosovo) will come to visit us three times per year and try to retire in five years to join us. If we can’t stay we have to move to a different country, because we cannot go back to Kosovo. Maybe Macedonia, if the situation gets better there, or France. You see, my daughter lives there.” Stela (F, 50+, m, arr:1999, unemployed)

The refugees who had decided that they would never return to Kosovo and had a stable position in the UK or Italy planned for their life there, making various plans about work, study, family, etc.. The refugees who hoped to return to Kosovo as soon as the conditions would allow them to, were trying to save money to be able to rebuild their house and start some kind of activities that could support them after return. They were not sure about when this might be possible, but they felt they had to be prepared for it. Floresha said that they had already bought a piece of land in Kosovo in order to build a house there because they hoped to be able to go one day. She thought that it was a matter of years before they could be able to feel safe again in Kosovo, but they wanted to be ready for that moment.

“Abbiamo comprato un pezzo di terra vicino a Prishtina e abbiamo intenzione di costruire una casa là. Speriamo di poter andare un giorno, ma passeranno degli anni prima di sentirci al sicuro completamente là. La situazione politica si deve stabilizzare prima. Ma meglio essere pronti.” Floresha (F, 40+, m, arr:1998, factory worker)

The refugees who felt they belonged to both places, Kosovo and the UK or Italy, imagined their future divided between the two. Generally, they considered the country of exile as their main place of residence and planned to go to Kosovo as often as possible and start investing there as soon as conditions improved. This was more common in Italy where many refugees had already lived a transnational existence over the years, they planned and wished to be able to continue to do so even in the future. Drita explained that her family wanted to rebuild the house in Kosovo because they might return to Kosovo one day, but they also wanted to keep their house in Italy considering that their children were growing up there and might need it. She said that their friends would all be in Italy and that they wished they could go to university there. She saw the future split between the two places.

“Noi vogliamo ricostruire la casa in Kosovo, ma vogliamo tenere la casa anche qui. Vedi, noi magari un giorno si ritorna pure, ma i bambini stanno crescendo qui, la casa può servire a loro. Fra qualche anno avranno tutti gli amici qui e poi vogliamo mandarli all’università. Qui ho già chiesto e mi dicono che siamo fortunati perchè l’università è una delle migliori d’Italia. Insomma, il futuro lo vedo un po’ qua, un po’ là.” Drita (F, 30+, m, arr:1994, factory worker)

In conclusion, refugees’ attitudes towards return and their plans for the future depended on their legal position and their level of integration in the country of exile, on the conditions in the country of origin and their personal background. These in turn were linked to the time of the flight, the reception, integration and repatriation policies of the country of exile, their relationship with the conflict in the country of origin, the post-war situation of Kosovo and its reconstruction.

9.5 Understanding return

This comparative study of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy has enabled me to analyse the impact of two different exile contexts and asylum policies on the settlement and return of a group of refugees who escaped from the same conflict.

The findings reinforce the idea that, despite the refugees' similar background, the different context in the countries of exile has a great influence on the choices available to them when settling and when deciding about return. The geographical position of the country of exile, the position of its government vis-à-vis the conflict, its asylum policies and the public views on refugees in general, and on the specific conflict in particular, are among the most influential factors in exile. For example, in the case of Kosovar Albanians, the refugees who were politically active were more likely to be able to fully engage with their homeland project in Italy. There, they settled mostly with work permits that allowed them to travel to meet other members of the Diaspora abroad and, given also the geographical proximity of the two places, go back to Kosovo for quick visits. For many refugees, this led the foundation of a transnational existence which is their current choice as opposed to return or local integration. On the contrary, in the UK, the prolonged condition of being an asylum seeker restricted the possibility to travel to other countries to meet other members of the Diaspora and, together with the distance between the UK and Kosovo, made even short visits to the country of origin impossible. Therefore, it is not surprising that many refugees who were politically committed to the cause had more difficulties in continuing their interaction with the conflict and with society in Kosovo over the years and, in some cases, felt like strangers when they finally managed to visit.

Another factor contributing to the decision of refugees on return is the condition of the country of exile at the end of the conflict. The study of the Kosovo case has highlighted the importance of the post-war context in the country of exile for both countries of origin and refugees. On the one hand, refugees' chances to decide about return and their decision itself were influenced by the position of the country of exile in relation to the post-war conditions in Kosovo. For example, the political claim that Kosovo was a safe country had serious consequences for the evaluation of asylum claims and appeals and had an impact also on the government's policies on the end of temporary protection and repatriation. On the other hand, their choice was also influenced by the level of security and stability in the country of origin, the conditions of the infrastructures and the economy which can encourage or discourage return.

These findings indicate the relevance of both, the country of exile factors and the country of origin factors, in refugees' decision to return. However, this should not mislead us to believing that refugees' choice on return is limited to a costs-benefits evaluation of the conditions in these two contexts or to thinking that both the country of exile and the country of origin exercise a deterministic impact on their choice.

9.5.1 A Rational Choice?

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, I claimed that in order to understand refugees' decision-making processes on return, the current models available based on rational choice theory cannot explain the whole complexity of the issue. The results of the interviews with refugees show that while there are practical measurable factors that influence the refugees' decision-making process (the level of security, the economic conditions, the state of the infrastructures) there is also an important range of other factors that at times can have an even more influential weight in the process (political commitment, sense of duty, fear, sense of belonging, etc.). The findings of this research confirm that an approach based solely on rational choice theory does not adequately explain the many cases in which refugees seem to choose against any 'rational' costs-benefits analysis. A good example is that of doctors wanting to return out of a sense of duty despite the possibility to remain in exile and the highly dangerous situation they might find in the country of origin. The results also reinforce the idea that refugees cannot be considered like labour migrants when examining return as I argued through the literature review in Chapter 3. They emphasize that many relevant factors influencing their decision and attitudes towards return are particular to the condition of the refugee, like the political commitment for the national cause pushing them to return or the fear of a new escalation of violence that refrains them from going.

9.5.2 Freedom and constraints

In Chapters 3 and 4, I argued for the benefits of researching refugees' decision on return within the context of the interaction between structure and agency, using Archer's analytical dualism and morphogenetic approach in order to explore the interaction between

the refugees, the country of origin and the country of exile. The views on choice, freedom and constraint suggested by this approach enabled me to analyse refugee policies and other structural factors influencing refugees' choice on return as possible enablement or constraint to their projects and this has shown to be an effective way of highlighting the ways in which different refugees respond to similar conditions. For instance, Explore and Prepare visits and repatriation programmes, despite their pitfalls, have represented an enablement for the refugees who wanted to return and could find some level of support in these schemes; however, they represented an obstacle to those who wanted to remain since governments often used these programmes as an alternative to deportation, stressing that it was time for them to go and showing to the public that refugees were given a 'choice'. In practice, this was not a choice about returning or remaining in exile at all, but only a choice about the way to travel back to Kosovo. On the other hand, good settlement policies and a stable status, enabled people to make a 'freer' choice about return and opened new options for them, such as the possibility to live a transnational existence between the two countries.

The context for the choice itself emerges from the interaction between country of exile, country of origin and refugees throughout the whole experience of exile, from the early moment of the flight to the moment the decision is taken, and influences also the kind of 'choice' refugees have to make about return. In the thesis I used the distinction suggested by Kunz (1973) between anticipatory and acute refugees in order to understand the impact of the whole exile experience on return, which has offered a useful tool for exploring these relations in the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees. In Chapter 5, 6 and 7, I related his typology to flight and settlement. I explained that anticipatory Kosovar Albanian refugees escaped for fear of persecution before the violence of the conflict escalated and in most cases they were politically committed to the cause of Kosovo. The time of their flight determined the moment they arrived in the country of exile and, therefore, the kind of asylum system they found. In addition, their political commitment to the cause of Kosovar Albanians and their personal background influenced the way in which they interacted with the country of exile. By the end of the war, when repatriation programmes started, they had spent a relatively long time in exile and, therefore, many of them had achieved a stable legal position and a satisfactory degree

of integration. This implied that they had all the options in relation to return at their disposal: continuing their life in the country of exile, return or attempting to live a transnational existence.

Acute refugees, on the other hand, left Kosovo in order to escape the immediate danger brought by the escalation of the violence and the war. In the vast majority of cases, they fled to safety in a neighbouring country and many of them migrated further to a different one, either independently or through the evacuation programme. In both cases, they arrived in the UK and Italy when the government was either beginning to get involved with the situation in Kosovo or was already supporting NATO's bombing campaign. As with anticipatory refugees, the time of their flight determined the moment they entered the country of exile and the kind of protection they obtained, which in the vast majority of cases was temporary protection. When the war ended repatriation programmes were organised with the scope to send them back. They had spent a relatively short time in exile and, given the kind of protection they received, they were less likely to have achieved a satisfactory degree of integration. In practical terms, they had a limited choice in relation to return. They could submit an asylum claim, return 'voluntarily' or risk deportation. Given the low acceptance rate of asylum applications from Kosovar Albanians after the end of the war, this often meant that they did not have a choice about whether to stay or return, but only about the way to return.

Given this context it is clear that as far as the possibility of choosing to remain or to return is concerned, refugees who have a stable position in the country of exile and a satisfactory level of integration also have more possibilities to remain if they chose to, therefore, their choice to return is not influenced by the impossibility or perceived difficulty to do otherwise. On the contrary, refugees who have an unstable legal position in the country of exile and have not achieved a satisfactory level of integration are more likely to be confronted by a limited set of options when deciding whether to stay or to return. This makes it more difficult to understand whether they are returning because they could not do otherwise or because they want to. I clarify that the above conclusions only explain the way in which the general experience of exile leads to different kinds of choice with regard to return, but do not assume that all refugees belonging to the first

group do not repatriate or that all refugees in the second group oppose return.

In order to explain the way in which refugees relate to these possibilities and understand their choice, Archer's distinction between Person, Actor and Agency indicated that we can study refugee repatriation decision-making processes at level of the Actor and the Agency and attempt to construct models that could predict certain patterns of behavior, but that, however, we cannot explain how within the same group of agents, two actors occupying similar roles take opposite decisions. With a sociological study of this kind, it is possible to claim that refugees who are committed to the homeland project are more likely to feel a duty to return and do so as soon as possible, but we cannot explain why two people who have witnessed the massacre of their families will be influenced by this experience in a different way, with one person not feeling able to return and live in the place where the atrocities happened, and the other wishing to return, rebuild and honor the victims with his/her resilience.

These are the differences that the human person brings to the choice and suggest that ultimately the focus should be on providing human beings with enough support to fulfill their projects, whatever these are.

9.5.3 Using the morphogenetic approach to study return

So far I have highlighted some of the main benefits of studying refugees' decision on return within the structure and agency debate, using analytical dualism and Archer's morphogenetic approach. Here I point at some further advantages and some of the difficulties this has implied in order to inform future research on repatriation .

As explained earlier in the thesis, Archer's analytical dualism is the foundation of the development of a three-part cycle composed of: structural 'conditioning' at stage T1, where a given structure conditions, but does not determine, the social interaction taking place at stage T2. At stage T2 this social interaction takes place because of actions oriented towards the realisation of the interests and needs of current agents and results in either structural elaboration (morphogenesis) or reproduction (morphostasis) at stage T3.

When researching refugee issues the picture is more complex because two different structural contexts have to be examined, the country of exile and the country of origin. The morphogenetic cycle begins at stage T1 when refugees, as the result of their interaction with the conflict, flee from the country of origin and arrive in the country of exile. There they find an asylum and immigration system which is the result of previous morphogenetic/static cycles of refugees and migrants interacting with the structures of the country of exile. At stage T2 refugees interact directly with the policies and the environment in the country of exile (understanding how the system works, trying to understand how to settle, etc.) and interact from a distance with the conflict in the country of origin (by setting up parallel government structures in exile, sending remittances, supporting the military organisations, raising the profile of their cause, etc.). At stage T3 we can have morphogenesis and/or morphostasis in both contexts. For example, in the country of exile the interaction can lead to a change in the asylum system or to the maintenance of general public views on refugees while in the country of origin this can contribute to a complete or partial regime change or the maintenance of the status quo.

This makes the application of this methodology all the more difficult as two parallel cycles need to be considered. Moreover, in practical terms, when researching refugee issues and analysing different waves of refugees we are faced with the overlap of different temporal cycles. On the one hand, this complicates the picture even further, but on the other hand, it also enables the researcher to capture the inevitable complexity of the phenomenon. This has been the case when differentiating between the interaction of different waves of Kosovar Albanian refugees, both in the UK and Italy, with the exile context.

Given the need to analyse the interaction between refugees and two structural contexts, the one in exile and the one in the country of origin, Archer's concept of double-morphogenesis becomes a 'triple morphogenesis' in refugee issues. This is the process by which people bring about social transformation in both contexts they interact with and which is, at the same time, responsible for the systematic transformation of their agency. This idea of triple morphogenesis has especially helped understanding the ways in which: the experience of receiving and hosting refugees has or has not changed the

country of exile, the experience of interacting with the exile community and returnees has or has not changed the country of origin and the experience of exile has or has not changed refugees.

The interaction between Kosovar Albanian refugees and the country of exile has strengthened the idea of repatriation as the best solution to refugee displacement. The fact that Kosovar Albanians have returned relatively early to Kosovo has been used as a way to demonstrate that all refugees want to return and that repatriation is the best solution. It has also reinforced the idea that temporary forms of protection can serve two purposes: showing solidarity and high moral standard by offering refuge to people in need, while guaranteeing that they will not stay. Obviously, this view of repatriation has emerged in spite of the refugees' efforts to resist deportation (in the UK), the doubtful conditions under which they were asked to return 'voluntarily' and the clear fact that few of the refugees who had a stable position in exile took part in the repatriation schemes supported by governments. In the UK, following the model used with Kosovar Albanians, a similar repatriation scheme has been used with Afghan refugees. Following military intervention in Afghanistan and the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, Britain stopped granting refugee status to Afghans. They were offered a repatriation scheme which started in April 2002 and lasted for six-months which was followed by forcible repatriation, for those who did not decide to go 'voluntarily'. A similar situation has more recently developed for Iraqi refugees as well.

The refugees' interaction with the conflict has contributed to the change of regime. Their work to support financially the community in Kosovo, their political initiatives, both non-violent and military ones, the efforts to bring the issue to the top of the international political agenda have all contributed to a change of scenario in Kosovo.

The experience of exile and the interaction with the country of exile and the country of origin has changed refugees as social actors and as agents, in Archer's sense, as collectivities sharing similar life chances. I have presented some example of refugees whose lives changed because of the different situations they found themselves in when in exile. The changing experience of women interacting with the British society who became more empowered and independent or the instance of those refugees whose education and

career plans were transformed by the lack of opportunities in Italy are good examples. The interaction with the country of exile and Kosovo has also changed Kosovar Albanians as collectivities. An example is that of the Kosovar Albanian refugee community in Italy which has undergone a change in the mode of settlement. This was a community whose life in Italy developed along the terms set out by Joly's Odyssean type. They were actively involved with the cause in Kosovo and settled focusing on the pursuit of their homeland project. As I explained in Chapter 7, conditions in Italy were favourable to this project as their official position of 'economic migrants' gave them the chance to travel, return to Kosovo for quick visits and meet with other members of the community abroad. However, despite the end of the war and the withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo, the area is still unstable and the future is uncertain. Therefore, they have now realised that return is not an immediate option for them and that being in Italy allows them to live a transnational existence. This has changed their mode of settlement and they have now begun to direct their attention to improving conditions for the community in Italy, while continuing to get involved with the situation in Kosovo. This suggests the emergence of a new type along Joly's Rubicon and Odyssean, which I call Janusian, whose settlement is oriented towards both improving conditions in exile and pursuing their project of society in the country of origin.

In conclusion, this thesis represents one of the first attempts to apply this methodology to a specific research issue and the first effort to use this framework in the study of refugee issues. Both the complexity of the methodology and the complexity of the research topic make its application all the more difficult, however, this study has proved some of the advantages of this approach in refugee studies and encourages further attempts.

9.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I focused on different issues which are relevant to the study of refugees' attitudes towards return. I began with an overview of Kosovo post-war conditions and the official position of the UNHCR and UNMIK on the return of Kosovar Albanian refugees. I then analysed the position of the UK and Italian governments on Kosovar

Albanians' return focusing on the options available to temporarily protected refugees at the end of protection and the return schemes set up for them. Having explained conditions for return in both the country of origin and the country of exile I, then, explored the attitudes of the refugees I interviewed in both countries vis-à-vis return. I focused on the general reasons for postponing or excluding return, their sense of duty and responsibility towards Kosovo, their sense of belonging and their future plans. In the final part of the chapter, I provided a general summary and a further analysis of the findings of the comparative case study of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy in relation to the general debate on the factors that influence their decision about return and drew some conclusions that can inform repatriation research in a wider context. I avoid here a further summary of these conclusions, since it is dealt with in the next, final chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 10

Summary and Contributions

10.1 Summary

In recent years refugee repatriation has moved to the fore of the debate on appropriate solutions to the issues of asylum and immigration. Governments have increasingly promoted it as the ‘ideal’ solution for refugees, representing it as their inherent wish. They have used such rhetoric to justify the imposition of increasingly more restrictive asylum and immigration policies, which typically leave refugees with little choice but to repatriate.

Within this context, in this thesis I examined refugees’ attitudes towards return and investigated the factors that influence their decision-making process in order to probe the validity of the assumption that all refugees want to return and identify the optimal conditions under which refugees can decide whether to return or remain in the country of exile.

In order to set the background for this study, I began the thesis with a brief overview of the changing political role of repatriation over the past three decades, examining the general conditions under which it began to be promoted as the best solution to refugee displacement and the ways in which it has played an increasingly central role in Western European countries’ asylum policies. I explained that as of the 1980s, and particularly during the 1990s, governments have combined the promotion of repatriation

with progressively stricter asylum policies and temporary forms of protection in an attempt to reduce the numbers of asylum claimants, justifying their actions through a rhetoric that promoted the idea that all refugees want to go home. These latest developments made an investigation into the factors that influence refugees' decisions all the more relevant and necessary.

In order to study the issue I combined the development of a theoretical framework for understanding refugee repatriation with the comparative study of Kosovar Albanians in Italy and the UK. The case of Kosovar Albanians is often used as both justification and illustration of the 'success' of European governments' repatriation policies due to the high number of Kosovar Albanians that have repatriated. This made it a particularly suitable case for questioning the very claim it is meant to support. Furthermore, a comparative study of this case enabled me to examine the effects of differing contexts in exile on a group of people who escaped from the same conflict.

In Chapter 3 the literature review on return migration and refugee repatriation highlighted the need for further research on issues related to refugee repatriation in general and indicated the limitations of the predominantly empirical or descriptive existing studies underlining the lack of in-depth qualitative analysis and theoretical synthesis. In response, I developed a theoretical framework that enabled me to capture the complexity of refugees' decision making process vis-à-vis return. The aim was that of avoiding three main common pitfalls in refugee research on return:

- firstly, considering refugee repatriation as being the same as any other type of return migration;
- secondly, considering refugees' decision-making process as a mere exercise of costs-benefits analysis;
- thirdly, analysing refugees as passive recipients of repatriation policies.

I argued that refugee repatriation should be considered as a special case requiring a specific approach within the larger study of return migration, questioning the view of Koser (1993) that refugees behave as any other kind of migrant when it comes to the

decision to return. Referring to the position of authors, such as Joly (2002), Kunz (1973) and Schuster (1998), who recognise that the set of experiences that cause a refugee to migrate and shape his/her life in the host country are inherently different from those of other migrants, I maintained that these differences also influence the way in which a refugee relates to return. Subsequently, through the review of the study on refugee repatriation by Cuny and Stein (1991), the Kinetic model of Kunz (1973) and the typology of refugees in the land of exile of Joly (2002) I established that there are major gains in contextualising refugees' attitudes towards return and studying repatriation in connection with the experiences that have preceded it in order to have a deeper understanding of its dynamics and its underpinnings. Then I examined the information and decision-making models of Koser (1993) and Collins (1996) and indicated the shortcomings of a utilitarian approach to the study of refugees' decision-making processes in relation to return. I argued that the use of a gain/loss paradigm based on rational choice theory when studying refugees' choice to settle or repatriate does not adequately capture the entire range of factors (beliefs, fears and emotional factors) or provide a satisfactory account of the complexities of the issue. I concluded that since the main issue behind this kind of debate is the larger sociological question about 'freedom and constraint', we needed to engage in a more sophisticated account of human beings' relations with the world and develop a more appropriate link between social action and social context when researching refugees and return. Based on this understanding and following a review of the main approaches on structure and agency, I proposed Archer's morphogenetic approach as the most suitable.

In Chapter 4, I expanded on Archer's methodological approach outlining some specific ideas of her work and their relevance to the analysis of refugee-related issues. Analytical dualism, through its formulation in the morphogenetic approach proposing the analysis of the structure and agency interaction through a three parts cycle, enables the examination of the complex relations between refugees, the conflict in the country of origin and the situation in the country of exile. Double morphogenesis can provide an account of the way in which refugees undergo changes themselves while interacting with the country of exile and altering or reproducing some of its structures. Asylum policies, and specifically repatriation policies, can be considered as forms of enablement or as

constraints to refugees' projects depending on different perspectives. Finally, Archer's stratified view of agency with its three levels of Human Person, Agent and Actor, enables us to acknowledge the individual character of refugees at their level of Human Persons, while considering their position within a given social contexts as Agents and Social Actors.

Based on the grounding provided by Archer, I then outlined the practical aspects of the research, providing an account of the research methods adopted. In short, I used a multidisciplinary approach combining interviews with refugees in the UK and Italy, interviews with policy makers, representatives of NGOs, international organisations and community leaders, alongside secondary analysis and documentary analysis. This allowed me to explore both the structural context in the country of origin and in the country of exile, and the refugees' perspectives in relation to them.

Given the complexity of refugee repatriation I examined two parallel cycles of interaction analysing refugees' direct engagement with the policies and the environment in the country of exile and their continuous interaction with the conflict in the country of origin even during exile. Moreover, I presented general overviews of the ways in which previous cycles of interaction led to the development of the conflict, which caused the refugees to flee from the country of origin, and of the interaction between other refugees and the policy and society of the country of exile, which set the context Kosovar Albanian refugees faced upon arrival in the country of exile.

I began the analysis of the case study by examining the historical background to the conflict in exile and exploring the refugees' position within it in order to understand how this influenced their flight and their mode of settlement. I then focused on their interaction with the policies and society in the country of exile and investigated how their positioning vis-à-vis the conflict impacted on their settlement and compared the way in which the two different contexts in the UK and Italy shaped their settlement in different ways. The case of refugees who were flown in to the UK or Italy through the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme in 1999 was examined separately in order to explore the impact of particular reception policies and conditions in exile on the return of Kosovar Albanian refugees. Finally, I focused on the analysis of the situation in Kosovo

after the war, return policies and refugees' attitudes towards return, which represents the kernel of the thesis.

The results of the research were presented through a division along the lines of: conflict and reasons for flight; settlement of refugees who arrived independently in the UK and Italy; experience of evacuees in the UK and Italy; and, finally, an analysis of return policies and refugees' attitudes towards return.

The conflict and the reasons for the flight

In Chapter 5, I explained that the history of Serbian-Albanian relations in Kosovo in the twentieth century was characterised by inter-ethnic tensions and divisions which often exploded into conflict involving the migration or forced migration of the two groups. I explained that different political developments in Kosovo led to different waves of Kosovar Albanian emigration and influenced the way in which the community settled in exile. I focused on the 1990s through both the historical analysis of the events in Kosovo and the results of the interviews. I distinguished between refugees who escaped because their political engagement with the conflict made them fear persecution and those who were targets of persecution simply because of their ethnicity. I explained how, during the 1990s, some of the emigration waves out of Kosovo bear the characteristics of anticipatory refugee movements. People left their home country before the deterioration of the military or political situation of the late 1990s, because they felt their life was in danger. This group included political activists (members of political parties, members of the parallel Kosovo Albanian government, students, journalists, etc.) and people who were specific targets of persecution (the youth, civil servants, doctors, teachers, professors, journalists, miners dismissed from their jobs because of their ethnicity). With the escalation of the conflict in 1998 and 1999, acute refugee movements left Kosovo. This was the case of people fleeing in mass or in groups, in order to escape the immediate violence brought by the war to their doorstep or because of the direct expulsion at the hand of the Serbian police. These refugees run to safety in neighbouring countries and, at a later stage, some of them re-emigrated to a different country either independently or through the evacuation programme set up by IOM for refugees in Macedonia.

I examined the experience of reception and settlement of refugees who arrived independently in the UK and Italy throughout the 1990s respectively in Chapter 6 and 7, and those who were evacuated in 1999 in Chapter 8.

Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK and Italy: spontaneous arrivals

In Chapter 6 and 7, the analysis of Kosovar Albanians settlement in the UK and in Italy indicated how the time of arrival often determined the kind of conditions they found in exile and highlighted the relevance of the refugees' personal background and positioning in relation to the conflict on their way of interacting with society in the country of exile.

In the UK, Kosovar Albanians generally found a structured asylum reception system which provided them with some kind of support, at the same time this limited their actions. The assistance received by asylum seekers offered some degree of minimum support, however, in the long run, it did not facilitate their integration by prolonging a state of uncertainty and promoting dependence. On the contrary, in Italy, they were confronted with a general lack of structures supporting asylum seekers and immigrants which made life tougher, especially at the beginning. However, this also allowed them more space for action. In both cases the most resourceful refugees had more chances to integrate: in the UK they could more easily understand the way in which the system worked and try to get the best out of it; in Italy they had more chances to overcome the problems created by the total lack of support and find alternative ways to support themselves.

Kosovar Albanians as a community had different modes of settlement in the UK and in Italy. In the UK the various community organisations focused their activities towards improving the conditions of Kosovar Albanians in the UK, while much less was done to raise the profile of the crisis in Kosovo. This depended on the individual refugees, but especially on the problems given by the geographical distance from Kosovo and their prolonged life as asylum seekers that made contact with other refugee communities abroad and travelling to Kosovo very difficult. In Italy, instead, the general conditions enabled them to organise activities with the aim of bringing the case of the oppression of the Albanian population in Kosovo to the attention of the Italian government and public

opinion and contributing to the running of the Albanian parallel structures in Kosovo before the war and during the reconstruction afterwards. Only recently the community has begun to organise collectively to improve the conditions for Kosovar Albanians in Italy.

The experience of evacuees in the UK and Italy

The case of the refugees evacuated to the UK and Italy was particularly interesting since it clearly demonstrated the impact of asylum policies on refugees. The initial response of the UK and Italy to the acute refugee crisis that exploded during NATO's bombing campaign was the promotion of reception in the region in line with other EU countries. However, with the crisis reaching worrying proportions, especially in the FYROM, both governments reluctantly accepted to host quotas of evacuees. They set up special reception programmes for them and received the refugees with the clear intent of sending them back to Kosovo as soon as possible. In the UK they were given a special kind of ELR, while in Italy they were offered a 'choice' between submitting an asylum claim, and, therefore, waiting for a long time with no support at all and no right to work, or temporary protection. In both countries Kosovar Albanian evacuees had temporary protection.

In Italy, despite the original good intentions to help the refugees to make the most out of their stay and prepare them for their eventual return, the reception of over 5,000 Kosovar Albanian evacuees in the former NATO's base in Comiso presented major problems. The high number of evacuees put the structure and the organisation of the centre under strain and a lack of coordination between the actors involved and a lack or misuse of resources made the situation even more difficult. Life for the refugees in the camp was difficult and, generally, solutions to their problems came too late when they had already started to leave the camp.

In the UK a special programme was set up for the evacuees, the Kosovo Programme, which was a reception system based on the long experience of the various actors involved with refugees. Kosovar Albanian evacuees were spread throughout the country, so that each reception centre received a manageable number of refugees and the programme

run very well with the satisfaction of all the agencies and the people involved, including refugees. However, when the end of temporary protection approached, the refugees began to be moved out of the centres into independent accommodations and when the whole programme ended, the special network of support to whom they had grown accustomed was shut; therefore, they had to turn to the general national asylum system. This left many of them disoriented as for the first time they faced many of the problems asylum seekers are generally confronted with immediately upon arrival without any special kind of support.

In both countries refugees experienced the stress and anxiety caused by the trauma of the violence they escaped from and the worry for the situation back in Kosovo. Moreover, they were anxious about their own future and, especially, the end of temporary protection.

Refugees and Return

In order to understand the context within which Kosovar Albanian refugees had to decide whether to remain in the country of exile or return, in Chapter 9, I considered the post-war situation in Kosovo and the position of the UK and Italian governments on their repatriation, including the return schemes set up for them.

I presented a brief overview of the conditions in Kosovo from the end of the war until spring 2004 and explained that, despite general improvements, the situation is still unsafe and the economy is still weak with an unemployment rate of around 60%. Moreover, the unresolved issue of the future status of Kosovo has turned the region into 'a pressure cooker' since violence might erupt again anytime. Different parties, the Serbian government, Kosovar Serbs, Kosovar Albanians and the international community all seem to prefer different solutions for the status of Kosovo and this creates further political tension. I explained that the UNHCR and UNMIK's various reports, having taken these problems into consideration, recommended that governments hosting refugees should not force Kosovar Albanians to return. They also indicated specific groups of refugees who were in particular danger of persecution if they returned and groups of vulnerable people who would not find the necessary care in Kosovo.

I demonstrated that, despite the fact that problems in Kosovo were not fully resolved yet after the war ended and regardless of the recommendations of international organisations working on the ground, governments have put pressure on refugees to return or forced them to repatriate. In the UK this was clearly stated by the Home Secretary in several public occasions and translated into a lower acceptance rate of asylum claims for Kosovar refugees in the year 2000 and 2001. In Italy, the unique case of the evacuees who returned within the first two months following the end of the war without any form of support, highlighted how keen the government was to show that, as promised, they were not going to stay.

Both countries organised return programmes which offered refugees grants to return. These were mostly targeted at temporarily protected refugees and had as the main goal that of maintaining the promises given to the electorate at the time of the refugee crisis in 1999 that Kosovar refugees were not going to remain. They were often used as an alternative to deportation and were represented as support to the refugees to return, as this was meant to be what they all wanted.

Overall, the study of Kosovar Albanian refugees, which has been portrayed as a success repatriation story, proves that this claim is unfounded as not all refugees want to return to the country of origin. The early repatriation of Kosovar Albanians was due to a combination of factors which cannot be held neither as an example of good practice nor as a full success story beyond a purely numerical point of view. The UNHCR explained that refugees returned in mass from camps in neighbouring countries for various reasons (poor conditions in the camp, worries for members of the family they left behind, worries that someone might occupy their house, worries for the approaching of winter) which do not indicate that Kosovo was a safe country and that return was their ultimate wish at that point. The analysis of the situation in the UK and Italy indicates that the vast majority of those who returned under the 'voluntary' repatriation programmes were refugees who had been given temporary protection or received a negative decision on their asylum claim. In Italy, the mass return of the refugees from the reception centre in Comiso has been at the centre of controversies over the standard of reception and the level of information about the different possibilities for the post-temporary protection

phase provided to the evacuees. Similarly to the case of the thousands who returned immediately after the war from camps in neighbouring countries, refugees from the Comiso base returned too soon without any support scheme in place. Of the remaining Kosovar Albanian population in Italy a few hundreds went back with the voluntary return programme, while the rest have decided to remain or return independently (figures on this case are not available). In the UK the conditions of Kosovar Albanian refugees with temporary protection or with a rejected asylum or ELR extension application restricted their choices to either returning with the scheme, independently or through deportation. There have been cases of people appealing and opposing deportation, but the government has continued to forcibly repatriate them.

In both countries, the refugees who had a stable position in the country of exile had the opportunity to choose about return without the pressure or threat of deportation. The interviewees in this position have clearly indicated that various factors related to conditions in exile and in post-war Kosovo and their personal relationship with them have had an impact on their decision. Although we can easily claim that security, the conditions of the infrastructures and the political and economic stability of the country of origin are among the most apparent concerns that stop refugees from considering return, there are other elements that play a relevant part in the decision-making process, which cannot be measured and are more related to the personal situation of different individuals. This implies that while host governments can intervene to improve conditions both in exile (with better asylum policies, fighting racism against asylum seekers, etc.) and in the country of origin (by aiding to achieve more durable safe and stable conditions) in order to contribute to the creation of optimal conditions under which refugees can decide about return, they should refrain from fostering situations that constrain their choices or divert it only towards the modality of return, rather than the actual decision on whether to return or to stay.

Moreover, the use of repatriation within the frame of new restrictive asylum policies risks causing the premature return of vulnerable groups of refugees in need of particular support and protection. In Chapter 6 and 7, I discussed the study of refugees' flight by Van Hear (2004), where he affirms that with the international migration regime becoming

more stringent the ability for refugees to flee at a given moment and reach certain destinations has become more and more connected to their resources (economic/financial capital, cultural/information capital, social and human capital). I have argued that this has also an impact on their ability to settle and integrate in the country of exile and the findings of this research indicate that this is also relevant in relation to return. First of all, in the case of Kosovar Albanian refugees, people with more resources managed to leave at an earlier stage before violence escalated and by the end of the conflict they had, generally, achieved a more stable position in the country of exile. This gave them the opportunity to decide about return without the pressure given by an unstable temporary status and their experience in exile had often provided them with more resources. The refugees who left during the acute phase of the conflict were often people with less economic, social and human resources and their temporary reception in exile often impeded their integration and restricted the terms of their choice. Mirroring the situation at the time of the flight, better resourced refugees have better chances to find themselves in a position to decide about their return, to make the most out of it or resist the pressures from governments. Overall, the analysis of the factors that influence the decision-making process with regards to return reveals that although some general predictions can be made, as we discussed so far, they must be done within a context that takes into account the entire experience of exile, from the pre-conflict situation up to flight and exile, while allowing space for the individual differences that each person brings to bear.

10.2 Contributions

In the thesis I presented a unique insight in the refugees' attitudes towards return and their perspective on the factors that influence their decision. This represents one of the few academic efforts to study both the repatriation policy context and the refugees' perspective on return through a qualitative study. Therefore, it marks a distinctive contribution to the study of refugee repatriation.

I contributed to the academic debate on the distinctions between refugees and labour

migrants. Both through the literature review and the findings in the field I demonstrated that the differences that characterise the two groups at the moment of migration also distinguish them at the time of return. Refugees have to deal with issues specific to their conditions (traumas, the post-conflict situation in the country of origin, security issues, etc.), both when deciding about return and when actually repatriating.

I developed a new theoretical and methodological approach to refugee repatriation based on Archer's form of sociological realism and her morphogenetic model. This formed the methodological framework that guided both the collection of data and the focus of the analysis allowing me to highlight the complexity of refugees' decision-making processes in relation to return. In the thesis, I indicated the advantages of using such an approach when studying refugees' interaction with both the country of origin and the country of exile and explored the way in which this has an influence on their decision-making process vis-à-vis return.

The thesis has also drawn on previous studies of refugee flight, settlement and return, which argue for the advantage of analysing refugees' flight and settlement in relation to the whole chain of events that characterise the experience of exile. I demonstrated the gains of using this approach when studying return and indicated the way in which the examination of repatriation in connection with the events preceding it can contribute to a better understanding of refugees' choice.

Through the use of Archer's concept of double morphogenesis I indicated the relevance of studying the way in which the experience of exile and the interaction with the country of origin and exile produce changes in the refugees. This approach has helped me to understand the way in which the initial positioning vis-à-vis the conflict and the original intentions about return can change while in exile.

Through the analysis of the specific case of Kosovar Albanians I further developed Joly's typology of refugees in the land of exile adding the Janusian type to the Odyssean and Rubicon ones. As I explained, Janusian refugees develop a mode of settlement which is both oriented at improving the conditions for the community in the country of exile and achieving their homeland project, making their overarching goal that of achieving a transnational existence between the two countries.

The specific case study of Kosovar Albanian refugees has also contributed to the general study of refugees in the UK and in Italy and the comparative perspective has highlighted the impact of different policies on both refugee settlement and return choice.

This research has demonstrated that the assumption that every refugee wants to return is not valid and, therefore, cannot be a good reason for supporting restrictive asylum policies.

Finally, the thesis has indicated that the optimal conditions under which refugees should choose whether to return are a stable position and the opportunity to stay in the country of exile, and safe and stable conditions in the country of origin. Repatriation should be part of a toolkit of solutions to refugee displacement available to refugees when making their choices and planning for their future.

10.3 Further work

This thesis is one of the few attempts to use Archer's morphogenetic approach to a specific research case and is the first effort to use this framework in the study of refugee issues. As I explained in the thesis, this is a complex methodology and its application to a specific research topic is challenging as the researcher is called to analyse a multiplicity of parallel and subsequent cycles of interactions; however, this study has proved some of the advantages of using this methodology in refugee studies and encourages further attempts. The use of this framework in the analysis of other topics could strengthen the relevance of its application to empirical studies, as this thesis has done, or highlight possible limitations that might arise from its application to other refugee related issues.

As explained in Chapter 4, the original research design of this thesis included fieldwork in Kosovo to interview returnees, however, issues of security made it impossible for me to secure funding and carry out that part of the research. Although, the fieldwork in the UK and Italy has provided sufficient data for exploring the main aim of this thesis, refugees' attitudes towards return and the factors that influence their choice, further research on the post-return situation would add a further perspective on refugee repatriation through the analysis of returnees' opinions on their choice after return and

the impact of their return on the reconstruction of Kosovo.

A suggestion for a further study to complete and advance the findings of this thesis would be the evaluation of the situation in the future. A study of the same refugees in the UK and Italy in about five years from the time of my fieldwork, could help us to find out if refugees have managed to achieve their projects, whether that is returning to Kosovo and starting a new life there, reaching full integration in the country of exile or developing a transnational life between the two countries.

The current political role of repatriation has a tremendous effect on refugees' lives in exile and on their possibility to choose about their future. This makes it all the more important for academics to attempt to study the dynamics underpinning the various facets of this phenomenon in order to provide well grounded answers to the many questions that current repatriation policies raise. This thesis is a step in this direction and a call for a more principled approach to the subject that takes into account its multidimensional character.

Appendix A

Interview Guidelines

Date, time and place:

Persons present (male/female, age):

PERSONAL DATA:

REFUGEE STATUS:

Life Before the conflict

What part of Kosovo are you from?

Rural/urban?

How was your life before the conflict?

Education?

Employment?

Housing?

Friends social life?

What was the family situation (parents, brothers/sisters) were you already married?

And did you have children?

Any family or friends living abroad?

Involved politically or socially in the local community?

During the conflict

When do you think the problems started for Kosovo?

How did your life change?

When was the conflict perceived personally as a threat?

When did you think about leaving?

Did the conflict arrived in the area were you lived?

Did you experience it directly?

Did you loose anybody or anything? what and who?

The Flight

When and how did you decide to flee?

Were there any alternatives?

How did you flee?

With whom (families and friends)?

Did you have time to plan the flight (Date, transportation, destination, take goods and documents)?

Any idea of what would happen next?

Hope to go back as soon as possible/ hope to find a good place abroad to start a new life/ hope to reach some families?

Left anybody behind?

What were the main worries?

Only for evacuees

Refugee camp in neighbouring country

In which camp did you arrive to?

Why that camp (nearest, told to go there, by chance, etc)?

If you left in a group, did the group remain together?

What were the conditions in the camp?

Any news about home?

Why did you leave the camp to come here)UK/Italy?

Did you personally decide to come to England/Italy?

If yes or no, why?

Did you have any alternatives?

How did you get to England/Italy?

Where you separated from families or friends?

Whom?

If yes, did you manage to know where the other were taken to?

In the host country - Reception centre evacuation programme

Where were you taken to in the new country?

Did you know anyone in the country that you could contact?

How was the reception centre organised?

Accommodation, food, clothing, health, legal advice, education, social event (TV radio)?

What were the good aspects and the bad aspects of the centre?

When did you understand what were your rights?

Did you organise yourselves in a group?

Any key figure or leader to refer to among you?

Were you involved in the activities?

Did you formally complain about anything?

What were the major needs and worries?

Who helped you in the centre - social Workers, doctors?

What was explained to you about your status and by whom?

While in the centre what did you think about the future?

What did you think it would happen when the bombing was over?

Did anybody talk to you about the options available?

If yes, Who and How?

Did you apply for asylum? When?

Did you think you would be deported or allowed to stay?

When did you hear of the decision about your application and what was it?

Only for refugees spontaneously arrivals

Independent Arrival

Did you plan to come to the UK/Italy?

Any connections in the country (friends/families)?

Who helped you when you arrived?

What kind of help did you get?

Did you apply for asylum at the border on arrival or later?

Were you helped by any refugee agency?

What were the main problems when you arrived here?

Settlement

Did you receive help from social workers, local council or local communities?

How would you change the system if you could?

Did you receive help from social workers, local council or local communities?

How would you change the system if you could?

Housing

Why did you settle in a particular place?

How did you find the accommodation?

Did you change several accommodations?

Are you close to friends and families?

How is the standard of the accommodation?

Legal advice

What was your first legal status in this country?

Did anybody help you with the application? Did you go to a lawyer?

Are you satisfied with the help you received? Are you happy with your lawyer?

What is the history of your legal status up to now?

Health Situation

Did you receive medical help?

Were you happy with the help you received?

How easy it is for you to see a doctor?

Is there a procedure you have to follow to see a doctor?

Employment

Do you have a work permit?

When did you get it?

How easy was it to find a job? What are the main problems encountered?

Do you do any voluntary work?

Language - Education

Did you speak English/Italian before you arrived?

If yes-How was your standard?

If not- how did you learn?

Did you attend classes?

Could you access education?

How crucial is speaking the language for you?

Social Life

Do you have more English/Italian or Kosovar friends?

Do you ever feel isolated?

Are you active in Kosovar Albanian or Albanian organisations?

Which ones?

What is the difference, if there is one, between the Albanian and the Kosovar Albanian organisations?

Are you involved with British/Italian organisations?

What are the activities you take part into?

Are you active in politics?

How have you contributed to the cause of Kosovar Albanians in Kosovo?

Racism & Discrimination

Have you experienced any form of racism in England/ Italy?

Have you faced discrimination by authorities or otherwise?

When and how did it happen?

What do you think people in this country think about Kosovo and Kosovar Albanians?

Refugee attitude towards the conflict

When do you think the conflict has finished?

Do you think it is now a safe country? What is your opinion about the NATO's bombing campaign?

How would you define the situation in the country since the NATO bombing finished?

Information Sources

Where do you get your information from?

Do you have direct information from home?

Do you still are in touch with relatives and friends there?

Letters, telephone?

Is it difficult or easy to keep in touch?

Home

What is home for you?

Is there only one home?

Where do you feel at home now?

Return with permanent status

Your attitudes towards return?

Why do you want to stay here?

Do you think you will ever repatriate at some point?

Under which circumstances?

How have you decided?

What factors have been more influential in your decision?

If you went back now what do you think could happen to you and how would your life be?

Would you have a house, a job, health facilities, social life, education opportunities, families network?

What Kosovo would you go back to? How has the exile experience changed you?

How has Kosovo changed?

Do you think that for certain people returning is considered an act of loyalty towards Kosovo?

If you went for a short visit Where did you go? Any feedback from your experience?

Only for refugees in the UK

Did you go on the Explore and Prepare programme?

If yes, why did you decide not to remain in Kosovo?

If not, did anyone of your family go on the programme?

Why did you decide not to go?

Did you hear about the ODA return project?

How did you come to know about it?

What was explained to you? Why and how did you decide not to go on the programme?

What do you think about it and the kind of support it offers?

Were you given other options settlement, resettlement?

What do you think about the reasons of those who went on the programme?

Only for refugees in Italy

Did you hear about the IOM return project?

How did you come to know about it?

What was explained to you and the kind of support it offers? Why and how did you decide not to go on the programme?

What do you think about it?

Were you given other options settlement, resettlement?

What do you think about the reasons of those who went on the programme?

Future Plans

Before the war what was your project about the future?

How has the war, the exile experience and the life in this country modified that project?

What is your plan for the future now? How do you think British/Italian asylum policies have influenced your plans?

How do you think that social difficulties in this country have influenced you?

Would you like to have English/Italian citizenship?

Could you give examples of good and bad aspects of staying in England/Italy?

and about the English/Italian societies?

Second Generation

Do your children speak Albanian?

Do you think it is important for them to know Albanian?

Do you want your children to become English/Italian citizens?

Who are their friends (other kosovars/ English/Italian children, other refugees)?

Futures plan for you children?

Final

Is there anything I have left out?

Or something you would like to add?

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Appendix B

Map of the Balkans



FIGURE B.1: Map of the Balkans in relationship to Italy

Appendix C

Letter of Information

I am a PhD student at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, and Prof. Daniele Joly is my supervisor.

My study deals with refugee repatriation movements from the European Union. The thesis focuses on the specific experience of Kosovar Albanian refugees in Italy and Britain, and the research gives fundamental importance to the opinion of the refugees themselves. The aim of the study is that of understanding the main factors that influence the decision of the refugees to stay in exile or go back to the place of origin. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and by the University of Warwick.

I am going to conduct fieldwork in the UK and Italy where I intent to talk to policy makers, NGO representatives and, especially, refugees.

It is of great importance for my research that I talk with refugees willing to collaborate to the project and I would very much appreciate your help and cooperation. If you decide to be interviewed for the study, you can suggest a place and a date for a meeting. An interview takes about 1.30 hr and I would be grateful if you could raise any need for an interpreter in advance.

Of course, I can provide proof of my position at the University of Warwick and explain what my project is about in more details. I am also very aware of the highly sensitive nature of the subject I wish to tackle in the interview and I know about the delicate

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ethical issues related to it. This is why I am willing to provide each interviewee with written guarantees about the anonymity and confidentiality of the data obtained during the interview.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time. Your decision as to whether to participate or not will have no effect on any benefits you now receive or may wish to receive in the future from any agency. For answers to questions pertaining to the research or research participants' rights, contact the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the address mentioned above or Prof. Joly directly at the e-mail address: D.S.Joly@warwick.ac.uk.

Katia Amore

Appendix D

Letter of Consent

University of Warwick

Letter of Informed Consent

Date

In signing this consent form, I ,....., agree to volunteer in the Graduate Studies research project being conducted by Katia Amore.

I understand that the research being conducted relates to the experiences of Kosovar Albanian refugees in the UK/Italy and their approach to the idea of returning to Kosovo. I understand that excerpts from my written transcripts and tape-recorded verbal communications with the researcher will be studied and may be quoted in a doctoral dissertation and in future papers, journal articles and books that will be written by the researcher.

I grant authorization for the use of the above information with the full understanding that my anonymity and confidentiality will be preserved at all times. I understand that my full name or other identifying information will never be disclosed or referenced in any way in any written or verbal context. I understand that transcripts, both paper and floppy disk versions, will be secured in the privacy of the researcher's home office.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw my permission to participate in this study without explanation at any point.

I grant permission to use one of the following:

My first name only

Only a pseudonym

Signature.....

Date.....

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